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OLD SLEUTH, THE DETECTIVE.  
By OLD SLEUTH.

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## Old Sleuth, the Detective; Or, THE BAY RIDGE MYSTERY.

By OLD SLEUTH.



OLD SLEUTH.

NEW YORK: GEORGE MUNRO'S SONS, PUBLISHERS,  
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## OLD SLEUTH, THE DETECTIVE.

By OLD SLEUTH.

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## Old Sleuth, the Detective; Or, THE BAY RIDGE MYSTERY.

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### CHAPTER I.

EMSLEY MERRITT had been gambling all night in a little tavern located on the shore road in the vicinity of Bay Ridge. He was a resident of Staten Island, at a point across the bay, directly opposite to the place where he had spent the greater part of the night. About two hours before daybreak, he arose from the gaming-table, dead broke, having lost every cent which he had had in his possession; consequently, as he proceeded along the beach to where his boat lay rocking on the incoming tide, he was in no pleasant humor.

Throwing in the anchor, he leaped into his boat, seized his oars, and gave several vigorous strokes, intending to back out, but some object was thumping against the stern, and impeded his progress. Supposing it to be merely a piece of debris, and, in fact, too full of bad whisky to be particular what it was, he did not bother his head to see what the floating obstruction might be, and merely swung the prow of his boat around so as to avoid it. But as he prepared to dip his oars for a vigorous pull, the object drifted alongside, and struck his boat with a heavy thump, when, with a cold shudder, he beheld it was the body of a man. After a second he recovered from the first shock, and was about rowing off, with the intention of leaving the corpse to be found by some one else, when a sudden thought caused him to change his mind, and instead of leaving the body to its chances, he arose in his boat, took an oar, and pressed the corpse up on the beach; and after securing his boat drew it entirely from the water.

It was a moonless night, and rather cloudy, still he was enabled to see that it was the body of a well-dressed man. For some moments he stood contemplating the ghastly object, when his eye was attracted by a little glistening spot on the bosom of the body, and a sudden horrible expression of mingled greed and furtive terror overspread his countenance, as examination proved the sparkle to be a glittering diamond. Around his neck, also, a closer inspection disclosed a massive gold chain, with curiously wrought links of unusual thickness.

A cold tremor shook the form of Emsley Merritt, as he cast a hurried and guilty glance

around to see if any person was near. Being satisfied that he was unseen, he quickly unclasped the pin from the dead man's bosom, and transferred it to his vest-pocket. It took but a second longer to raise the head and draw over the ghastly features the chain, to which was attached a heavy double-cased watch.

This also was hidden upon the person of this man, whose motions proclaimed him an intended robber of the dead.

Just as he secreted the watch in his pocket he was startled by a sound, and a cold sweat broke out all over his body at the thought that his suspicious actions had probably been witnessed. Terror impelled him to get into his boat and pull away, but an instinct stronger than terror, the demon of greed, had taken possession of his soul. It flashed through his mind that the body upon which he had already found such expensive articles, might have still more valuables upon it. The careless waves had washed this treasure-corpse to his feet, and he resolved to retain possession, at all hazards, of what he had secured. He carried a pistol; the partial committal of one crime had already made him ready to commit a still darker one. Quietly cocking his pistol without removing it from his pocket, he stealthily proceeded along the beach, in the direction from whence the sound came.

He had not walked far, when he beheld the form of a man crouching behind one of the many bowlders which, at intervals, are scattered along the beach. Coming to a halt, he inquired in a low voice:

"Who's there?"

"Halloo, Merritt! is that you?" replied the skulking individual, as he arose and approached.

"Yes, it's me; and what if it is?" said Merritt, in an angry tone, as he recognized the voice of his questioner as one Hank Skinner, a worthless and notorious hanger-on around the village bar-rooms.

In return to Merritt's angry interrogation, Hank responded:

"Oh, nothing in particular; but I didn't think it was you, or I would have come down where you were."

"Why didn't you, if you wanted to?"

"Well, I'll tell you. I wanted to get the

bearings first. I didn't recognize you, and I didn't know but that it was a murder, you see."

"A pretty nice place to select for a murder."

"Well, but you can't tell," said Hank. "I just happened to come along as you were going through the stiff, and I thought I'd dropped on one of those mysteries that happen now and then. But, howsoever, as it's only you, I guess I'll take a hand in, and we'll go and finish the job."

"What job?" said Merritt, innocently.

"Why, haven't you got a stiff down there, that's just floated in? Do you think I'm a fool, and didn't see you going through the pockets? Hal! hal! I want a square deal, old man, or it's a squeak. But, by golly," laughed the fellow, "who would have thought that Emsley Merritt, of Wall Street, was a corpse robber?"

A terrible purpose gleaned from Merritt's eyes, and a deadly pallor overspread his face, as he said hoarsely, "How do you know that Emsley Merritt, of Wall Street, is a thief?"

"What! you're going to fly off, are you? Didn't I see you take something from the dead man's bosom? and didn't I see you take the chain and timer from his pocket, and put it in your own, where it is now?"

"Well, s'pose you did, wasn't that natural enough, under the circumstances? What else would I do? I merely took them for safe keeping."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," said Hank, pointedly; "you only took them to hand over to the coroner. But, old man, that don't go down; you didn't act like a man that meant honest; you were in considerable of a hurry stowing those things away, when you could have had witnesses down, if you wanted 'em, in ten minutes. No, no, Merritt, that don't go down; you were robbing the dead. But, howsoever, that's all right. I hain't always waited for men to die in my time to go through them. Well, come, if there's any more valuables on that stiff we'll lose 'em, if we don't finish the job pretty soon."

"What do you mean?" inquired Merritt, fiercely; "do you want me to help you rob the dead?"

"Oh, that's played, Emsley Merritt," answered Hank; "all I want's a square rake."



"A square rake in what?"

"Oh, don't try and sing an honest tenor on me, you've got to make it a square deal, or all goes to the coroner, including that toy you've got in your pocket, and that watch and chain you've stowed somewhere."

While this dialogue was being carried on, Merritt had been revolving matters rapidly in his active brain, and weighing probabilities. He did not wish to give up what he had secured, for, unknown to his friends, Emsley Merritt, a clerk in a banking-house, was in desperate circumstances. The valuables were particularly necessary for his financial salvation, and he was willing to take long chances to retain them. On the other hand, he did not wish to be linked in such an ignoble crime with such a notorious rascal as Hank Skinner, as he knew that it would give the fellow a hold on him for the rest of his life. By the time Hank had finished speaking, Merritt had decided on a course of action. In answer, he said:

"Well, to tell the truth, I had no intention of keeping these things, but luck has run against me to-night, and I don't know but that you and I are about as well entitled to them as anybody else. If we don't take them, that slippery justice of the peace, or some other thief, will."

"Of course they will," said Hank, encouragingly.

"But come, old man, we must be quick, or some of the fishermen will be around here to take advantage of the flood-tide."

The two men now proceeded to where the body lay, and Hank was about to thrust his hands into the dead man's pockets, when Merritt suggested that they had better fasten a stone to the body, to keep it a foot or two under the water, and tow it over toward the other shore, where they would be less likely to encounter any interruption, and where, after they had gone entirely through the body, they could sink it. This plan suited Hank, and they proceeded to put it into execution.

After rowing some distance into the bay, Merritt, who held the oars, requested his companion to take them. After they had changed seats, he drew the body up to the surface, and inserted his hands into the drenched pockets, one after another.

In the pantaloons-pocket he found a few gold pieces, but in the breast pocket of the coat, he found a large pocket-book. Hastily opening it, he discovered that it was full of bank-bills and checks. A chuckle of quiet delight agitated Hank as Merritt displayed these various proofs of the richness of their booty. The effect upon Merritt was very different, and remarkably singular. As he unrolled the large package of checks and bills, a peculiarly thoughtful expression settled upon his face; at the same time he placed the wallet into his pocket.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Hank, as he suddenly ceased rowing, "just chuck that down on the seat, if you please, until we get a chance to take it on the square."

"Oh! I guess it's safe enough where it is," replied Merritt.

"I guess not," replied Hank; "but have you made a clean go through?"

"I guess I have."

"Well, cut the body loose, and let it sink," said Hank.

Merritt unclasped a knife and cut the rope, and the body of the plundered dead sunk quietly to the bottom. As it did so, Hank Skinner exclaimed:

"Look here, Merritt, I want a square deal here; you just lay that pocket-book down there on the seat, or else hand it over to me."

"I'll do no such thing," replied Merritt, doggedly.

"Then, by heavens, I'll take it!" exclaimed Hank, "and chuck you overboard, to keep company with the dead man at the bottom;" at the same time he rose from his seat and flourished one of the oars over Merritt's head.

"Hold!" cried Merritt; "are you going to strike me?"

"I am going to have that pocket-book, if I have to strike you to get it."

"Why, what's the matter with you?" ejaculated Merritt; "you don't want more than your share, do you?"

"I didn't at first; but I don't like your movements—you're on the gouge. There's bills and checks there; I want all the bills; you can have the checks."

"Well, can't you wait until we get ashore?"

"No, I won't wait a minute," replied Hank;

"this is as good a place as any. Give me the pin, the watch and chain and the bills; you keep the checks, and I don't doubt but what you'll have the biggest share then."

"I won't make any division until we get ashore, and then we'll divide even."

"Will you hand that pocketbook over here?" said Hank.

"No, I won't," answered Merritt.

"Come now, Merritt, I ask only what is just and fair. We are entitled to equal shares, so hand it over."

"I've told you no, and I mean no."

"Then take that," yelled Hank, and as he spoke, he swung the oar around, to deal Merritt a terrible blow, but his foot slipped, and he tumbled headlong into the water.

"Well, fortunately, I had no hand in his death," Merritt muttered to himself.

Hank sunk rapidly to the bottom, while Emsley Merritt seized his oars and in the dim light of the early morning pulled to the Staten Island shore.

## CHAPTER II.

A WEALTHY banker sat in his inner office, at the rear of his magnificent counting-room, situated in New Street, near Wall. He was a tall, square man, with iron-gray hair, and a dark, piercing eye, and aquiline nose, and a mouth expressive of determination and firmness. He was evidently one of the class of men who can delay and higggle over a negotiation for weeks, to secure the most trifling advantage. His character was strongly and clearly drawn upon his features; he was a cold, pitiless, heartless, exacting, money-worshipping man, and this man—this wealthy, aristocratic banker—is the Emsley Merritt of our previous chapter.

Fifteen years had passed since the night when he had robbed the dead body, which he found thumping against the stern of his boat on the Bay Ridge shore.

As previously related, when he arose from the gambling-table upon that eventful night, he had lost all the money he had had in his possession; and what was still worse, that money was not his own to lose. At that time he was a clerk in a widely known banking-house; but the demon of gambling had taken possession of his mind. Under this fearful influence, he had gone on from step to step, until every cent of his own had been squandered. Having been a confidential clerk, he had been enabled to draw his salary in advance, until he had become indebted to the firm for nearly one year's advance pay. And still the demon held his conscience, and still he pursued that *ignis fatuus* of a gambler's mind—a big stake—until from overdrawing his salary he advanced one step further on his perilous path, and began to appropriate money not his own, and to wash his accounts.

Thus it was that upon that eventful night he was a defaulter to a large amount; and then the devil took care of his own; and as is usually the case, exacted a more deadly price, by placing a fouler temptation in his way. The ghastly treasure-body lay at his feet, with the present reward for an ignoble crime in its drenched pockets. Between its possession intervened the meanest act to which humanity can descend, and required, also, the perpetration of one still more horrible. But the reward was there. Previous gradual surrender to wicked influences, an imminent peril consequent upon this surrender, had prepared Emsley Merritt to go any length for gold, and as related, he became a plunderer of the dead, and finally the indirect murderer of his forced confederate.

Emsley Merritt's position, a few days later, enabled him to convert the checks into cash, and the amount he secured was sufficient to cover up all of his deficiencies, and still left him a handsome capital to engage in business on his own account. Singularly enough, this final guiltiness resulted in a total eschewment of the primary wicked practices which had led to it—he forswore gambling and confined himself to legitimate business speculations—and none the less remarkable was his sudden detestation and contempt of gambling and gamblers. His own previous indulgence and experience in the strategy of unprincipled sharpers had endowed him with a keenness and boldness in his operations which was the envy of his associates; consequently, a wonderful success attended his speculations, and now, after fifteen years, we find him a millionaire—a power in financial circles—a successful man.

Recently his money-loving nature had been

stirred to its very depths; he had been the victim of a series of successful robberies. Certain reasons had induced him to confine the knowledge of his losses within his own breast, and he had exerted all his ingenuity and cunning to obtain some clew to the thief. But, after weeks of the most skillful detective efforts on his own part, he had failed, and was finally compelled to call in a professional thief-taker, and trust to his greater experience. Thus it was that in the opening words of this chapter, we find Emsley Merritt sitting in his private office awaiting the appearance of one of the most noted private detectives in the metropolis.

He had waited long past the hour appointed, and yet the expected officer had not come. The great banker began to wax exceedingly wroth. Twice he had come out of his inner office into the counting-room and had inquired whether any person had called for him, or whether any stranger had made any inquiries. The reply was, that there had been none other than the usual comers, "except that old fellow over there," whispered the clerk, as he pointed to a tall, broad-shouldered, country-looking old man, who alternately walked in the outer space from the desks, or sat reading a morning paper through a pair of iron-rimmed spectacles, over which the clerks had observed him shyly glancing now and then, and the keenness of his glance had struck them as rather peculiar for a near-sighted person.

"Who is he? and what does he want here?" inquired the banker, as he deliberately eyed the rustic.

"Well," replied the clerk, "it is hard to tell what he wants; he has been here nearly two hours; he says he is waiting for some one he was to meet here, but the fact is, sir, I consider his motions rather suspicious."

"What have you observed that looks suspicious?" asked the banker.

"Several times I have seen him look up from the paper, when he thought himself unobserved, and slyly watch the movements of the clerks, and with a keenness in his eyes which is out of place behind those spectacles."

The banker was a shrewd man; in an instant the truth flashed upon his mind. This innocent-looking old fellow was a detective, who was taking observations before the suspicions of the clerks should be aroused as to his real character. Emsley Merritt had sagacity enough to know that it was to his interest to favor the deception, consequently he said to the clerk carelessly:

"Oh, there's nothing suspicious about that; probably he is some countryman with whom some of our customers have an appointment. Those looks are merely the result of rustic diffidence and curiosity."

As the banker said this he returned into his private office, and the business of the counting-room proceeded as usual until mid-day; and no detective called. In the meantime the old countryman had remained, apparently alternately perusing and dozing over his paper. At last with a yawn he rose, stretched himself, and remarking that he guessed his friend had forgotten him, passed out.

Matters again settled into the usual routine, until about three o'clock, when a tall, elderly, handsomely dressed, business-like looking man entered the office, and briskly inquired for Mr. Merritt. After a moment's delay, he was shown into the banker's private office, the door of which, as he entered, he closed. The party being a total stranger, this action, especially the manner of it, did not please the banker, and he was about to rise and reopen the door, when the stranger handed him a card, on which was printed "Sleuth, Detective." The little paste-board explained matters at once, and the banker resumed his seat; as he did so, he observed, "My impression was that gentlemen of your peculiar profession were particularly prompt in keeping appointments."

"Always!" replied the detective.

"Well, sir, I may have been mistaken; but if I remember rightly, your note informed me that you would be on hand between ten and eleven; it is now nearly three o'clock."

"Your memory is correct, sir," said the detective, deliberately, "between ten and eleven was the time named. As a usual thing, sir, I do not go into explanations; but as it might tend to mar your confidence in me if I did not explain thus far, I will merely say that I kept my appointment. I was here shortly after ten, and remained until after twelve."

"Ah! yes," answered the banker, with a



knowing shrug, "I understand; yes, yes—I thought so. I was not deceived; but you have succeeded in making a wonderful transformation in your appearance."

"Excuse me, sir," said the detective, shortly, "but this is not a part of our business; gentlemen of our profession, as a matter of course, assume many different guises. If you please, we will proceed to the more immediate business on hand."

"You are right, sir," replied the banker, as a slight flush mantled his hard, white cheek; "what I said was merely complimentary," he continued; "but, as you say, let us proceed to business. Which one do you suspect?"

"I suspect no one."

"Then the result of your observations this forenoon are unsatisfactory?"

"Not at all, sir," answered the detective. "I was merely reconnoitering this morning; posting myself as to the routine and personnel of your office, so that when I came to hear your story, I would know exactly how to adjust little circumstances, and sift trifling statements. My observations this forenoon were merely preparatory."

"Ah! I see," said the banker; "and I must say that there is a vein of fine strategy in that. And now how do you propose to proceed?"

"In the first place I want a succinct statement of the actual facts; you may then furnish me with your own suspicions."

The banker now proceeded to relate the circumstances, as far as known, attending the several robberies, and then added his own suspicions, the result of personal investigations.

He concluded by adding, that among other articles missing was a curiously-wrought chain, which he had kept in his safe as an extra precaution.

The first move of the detective was to get an accurate description of this chain: he then proceeded to ask a number of pertinent questions.

After furnishing every little scrap of information which occurred to him, the banker asked directly the detective's opinion. But that gentleman evaded a direct answer. This hardly satisfied the banker, and he asked, rather impatiently:

"Have you no distinct suspicions?"

"I have a number," replied Sleuth. "I will trace them all; and have no fears but that I shall strike the right trail, finally, and run the thief to earth. But I wish to ask you one more question," the detective went on to say. "Have you designated every person connected with your office?"

"Every one," replied the banker, "unless," he continued, carelessly, "my son."

"Oh, then your son is also connected with your office," said the detective, without a change of countenance.

"Yes," replied the banker, "I have recently placed my son in the counting-room, but, of course, he is beyond the pale of suspicion."

"Then you only wish me to shadow the thief in case it is a stranger?" said Sleuth, pointedly. "If suspicion should point toward your son, you do not wish me to make suspicion a certainty in his case?"

"What do you mean, sir?" exclaimed the banker, turning red and pale by turns. "Dare you, in my presence, cast suspicions upon my own son?"

"I cast suspicions upon no one, as yet," answered Sleuth; "but you know we have met with some remarkable developments in our business. To trace this thing out, I don't say that it will be so; but it may be that I shall have to line up the track of every one connected with your office. You will excuse me, but I have known instances in my experience where detectives have unmasked flesh and blood, and have subsequently been blamed by timorous relatives, who would rather have sustained losses than be appalled by the exposure of their own kin. I may say that, as I stand now, I have no more suspicion concerning your son than you have; but I want to know my ground. I must know my boundaries. Suppose during my investigation I should find it necessary to shadow your son: do you want me to do it?"

The banker's keen eyes glittered, and his thin lips quivered, as he replied:

"Mr. Sleuth, I want to discover the thief, but I charge you let nothing but the most positive ground for suspicion set you to haunting the steps of my son. But if the magnet points strongly that way, shape your course by it: I have not employed you as a father, but a business man. I want to find out the thief. There are no restrictions from me, between you and

the rascal, be he who he may. Is there anything more?"

"That's all for the present," replied the detective; and as he passed out before the clerks, the sharp shrewd expression which rested upon his features, while conversing with the banker, had vanished, and he appeared merely like a brisk, good-natured, well "banked" man of business. Still, strange as it may seem, right in the face of his assurances to Emsley Merritt, upon leaving that gentleman's presence he immediately began making inquiries, and commenced "piping" the character and habits of the banker's son, Emsley Merritt, jr.

### CHAPTER III.

A NUMBER of years ago the Variety Theater, 444 Broadway, previous to its destruction by fire, was as widely known and freely patronized by Gothamites and strangers as was the equally celebrated Barnum's Museum.

It is to the interior of this theater we wish to take our readers. It is a gala night, and unusual attractions have been advertised to attract hither lovers of novelty, song and jests. The curtain has just been rung up, the orchestra have tuned up their fiddles, and sit with their bows ready balanced to launch forth with an instrumental accompaniment to the songstress of the evening. There is a moment of expectation, the audience is on the *qui vive*, and an instant later a wild burst of enthusiastic applause greets the appearance of a beautiful girl, who, music in hand, advances to the footlights. As she patiently waited for the applause to subside, a pleasant, cheery smile rested upon her beautiful countenance. At last the orchestra began playing, and she essayed to sing; but no sooner had the first clear, sweet note thrilled upon the ears of the audience, than she was interrupted by renewed applause, so vehement in its manifestations as to drown the sound of the instruments and compel the singer to desist, and thus again and again she attempted to sing, and each time her voice was drowned by the unanimous and prolonged plaudits of the audience. The position of the singer now became exceedingly embarrassing. The whole performance was apparently brought to a standstill. How long this singular and unusual scene might have continued is doubtful, had not the stage manager finally interfered. When the lovely creature again attempted to sing, the enthusiasm of the audience was held in check, and no interruption occurred until she had concluded the first verse of her song. Then a wild, tumultuous shout arose from every quarter, and the same vociferousness succeeded each verse until its conclusion; then for fully five minutes the boisterous yells of approval continued, and was only finally choked off by the appearance of the ever-popular and irrepressible genius of fun, the solo banjoist.

During this remarkable scene, three fashionably dressed young men, standing near the door, were most prominent and loudest in their demonstrations of approval. As the singer retired from the stage, the youngest of the three turned to his companions and said, in a voice which he intended should not be overheard:

"This is the last time these yelling idiots shall have the pleasure of feasting their vulgar eyes on the charms of that elegant creature!"

"Why, Ley, my dear," answered one of his companions, "how are you going to stop it, I would like to know?"

"I'll stop it somehow, you bet!"

"But how, that's what I want to know?" again spoke his companion.

"By a bold move. I'm going to go for her, you bet. I'll rush the thing!"

"Don't be rash, Ley, my boy," said his friend, patronizingly. "It wouldn't please the aristocratic ideas of Emsley Merritt, the millionaire, to have his son mixed up in such an eclairsissement!"

"Oh! bother the millionaire!" replied Emsley Merritt, jr.

"But, my chicken, that old rooster will stop scratching golden grains for you, if he hears of your running after public singers!"

"Well, Ned, I'm going for Minnie Lamont, grains or no grains. The fact is, boys, that creature has bewitched me, and I am resolved to marry her. You may be certain I'll have an answer from her to-night."

The latter portion of these remarks was made while the party stood at the bar. This gilded saloon for the sale of spiced poisons faced on Broadway, but had a side-door leading from the

broad entrance to the theater. As previously stated, the conversation between the three young men was carried on in very low tones, and, as they supposed, was not overheard. In this they were mistaken. Leaning against one of the pillars which supported the gallery, was a tall, handsome, beardless young man, whose attention had been attracted by the appearance of the elegantly dressed trio.

During the excitement attendant upon the singer's appearance, his attention had been divided between the singer and the three young men. A singular look of surprise had illuminated his countenance when he beheld the songstress advance to the footlights. This same surprise had nightly been evinced by the more respectable portion of the audience upon beholding her truly beautiful face; in fact, her whole appearance was a matter of wonder, as every movement was so unlike that of females generally seen upon the boards.

When the three young fellows adjourned to the bar, they were followed by the stranger. While they stood drinking, he leaned over the end of the bar, and apparently conversed in an indifferent manner with one of the assistant barkeepers. Between each drink, young Emsley Merritt and his companions engaged in an earnest conversation, and the utmost strain of their watcher's listening faculties only enabled him to catch a word here and there; but as they turned away and walked toward the street entrance he heard these words distinctly:

"Twenty-third Street stage, Tenth Avenue."

At the door the companions of young Merritt left him, while he returned to the bar and recklessly consumed two or three more rather heavy doses of fashionable rot-gut. Two hours later a neatly dressed, heavily veiled lady entered a Twenty-third Street stage, at the corner of Broadway and Broome Street; at the next corner the same stage was entered by young Emsley Merritt. Half a block still further up the stage was again hailed, and took up another passenger, who proved to be the young man who had so steadily watched the movements of young Merritt at the theater. The stage was now comfortably full, but by the time it arrived at the corner of Broadway and Twenty-third Street all the passengers had alighted with the exception of the veiled lady, Merritt, and the watchful young stranger.

The latter, upon entering the conveyance, had observed that Merritt was seated opposite the lady, and he himself had taken a seat near the door. While the other passengers were in the stage nothing unusual had occurred, but when the last one left, Merritt changed his seat to the same side with the young lady, when she immediately arose and took a seat on the opposite side, near the center of the stage. As she changed her seat, young Merritt, who was evidently partially intoxicated, said:

"What's the matter, Minnie? I ain't poison."

The young lady made no reply to this remark, but turned her face and looked out of the window, seemingly to see at what point the stage had arrived. For a moment Merritt said nothing more, but cast an inquiring glance upon the remaining passenger, evidently considering what interference he was liable to meet with from that individual. Apparently satisfied that he had nothing to fear from that quarter, or reckless of consequences, he again seated himself beside the young lady whom he had addressed as Minnie. As she attempted to rise he threw his arms around her waist to hold her back. Then, for the first time, the lady spoke. Drawing aside her veil, and disclosing the lovely features of the songstress who had so recently charmed the audience at 444, she exclaimed:

"Emsley Merritt, I warn you, for your own sake, to unhand me!"

"Sit down, then, sit down," replied the half-intoxicated young man, "don't put on airs; I want to talk to you."

"I wish to have no conversation with you at all, Emsley Merritt," she exclaimed. "Had I not wished to avoid a scene, I should have screamed sooner; but if you do not immediately let me go, and leave this stage, I shall call for assistance."

Now, for the first time, the young stranger, who, up to this period, had remained a passive witness of the scene, spoke, and said, in rich manly tones, as he moved opposite to them:

"It is unnecessary, miss, to call for help; if you request it, I will soon cause this unmanly scamp to release you."

"Oh! if you only will protect me," answered Minnie, as tears burst from her eyes. "I



feared," she continued, "you were this fellow's confederate."

During this colloquy, Merritt had released Miss Lamont, and as she again seated herself on the opposite side of the stage, he addressed the young stranger as follows:

"Look here, young fellow, can't you mind your own concerns, and let a pair of lovers settle their little spats between themselves?"

"If the young lady desires me to, I will; otherwise, I shall have to request you to tumble out of this stage."

The stranger seemed too formidable to provoke too much, consequently the discomfited young scoundrel instantly concluded that discretion was the better part of valor, and, with many muttered threats of future vengeance, skulked out of the stage.

As the door closed upon the thwarted exquisite, Minnie turned to thank her defender, who, with a pleasant smile and in a richly modulated tone of voice, informed her that his being present to protect her was not by chance. He said that he had been at the theater, and overheard a conversation between young Merritt and some companions, which led him to believe that some mischief was intended.

"And," he added, "having sisters myself, and a perfect contempt for such effeminate but dangerous youths, I determined to watch their movements, and, if possible, prevent the consummation of their mischievous designs."

Minnie was profuse in her acknowledgments; and was about to explain her acquaintance with young Emsley Merritt, when the stage suddenly stopped, and the driver called down through the ticket trap:

"This stage don't go any further; we are up to the stables."

Then, upon the instant, Minnie became aware that during the excitement and consequent necessary explanation attending the occurrence, she had ridden far beyond the place where she usually alighted, and several blocks away from her direct route home. As a look of mingled surprise and fear stole over her countenance upon hearing this disagreeable information furnished by the impatient driver, the young gentleman at a glance took in the situation, and in a reassuring manner told her to feel no alarm, as, with her permission, he would accompany her safely to her home. With many blushes and renewed thanks, Minnie accepted his escort.

As they passed along, she availed herself of the opportunity, and rapidly related the circumstances which had led to the assault.

Minnie was an orphan, and had entered the house of Emsley Merritt, senior, as a governess for his young daughter. She had not been long in the Merritt family, before Emsley, junior, began paying her very marked and impertinent attentions. In self defense, she had been compelled to appeal to his mother; instead of securing either sympathy or protection, she was ignominiously turned from the house as a designing hussy. Being entirely dependent upon her own exertions for support, she had striven to obtain another situation as governess, and had failed.

She then sought to obtain a livelihood by working upon a sewing-machine, but the work proved too trying upon her strength; besides the constant insult she was subjected to, from companion operators, finally induced her, as a last resort, to take advantage of her musical abilities and wonderful voice, and go upon the stage; not from choice, but forced by circumstances and necessity, as the duties were really less arduous, and the pay comparatively munificent.

For a year subsequent to leaving the family of the Merritts, Minnie had seen or heard nothing of them, but it so happened that upon the night of her first appearance as a singer, Emsley Merritt, junior, straggled into the house, instantly recognized her, and from that moment had renewed his hateful attentions, subjecting her to continual annoyance and distress. All of these facts Minnie felt called upon to relate to her gallant and handsome defender, as she had sufficient experience during years of struggles to know that many false interpretations might be placed upon the affair; and an instinctive feeling of self-defense against any possible misapprehension impelled her to thus immediately openly explain matters, and guard herself from a moment's suspicion.

During this narration, which was recited as succinctly as possible, Minnie and her companion had retraced considerable of the lost distance.

Thus far they had encountered no one during

their walk; not even a solitary policeman; but at the moment they arrived at the corner of Twenty-fourth Street, a coach, which was being rapidly driven up the avenue, stopped, and three men emerged therefrom.

The young man accompanying Minnie had been so engrossed in her story, that he did not observe the coach until his attention was called to it by an exclamation from his fair companion, who, as the foremost man stepped toward them, clutched his arm convulsively, and cried:

"Oh, my God, there he is again!"

"Have no fears," said her companion, hurriedly, although without the least exhibition of nervousness. The next instant they were confronted by the three men. One of them, who proved to be young Merritt, exclaimed, with an air of triumph:

"Now, my gay cavalier, I guess we can cook your mutton for you. Just pass that young lady over to my care, if you please!"

"I'll pass you heels over head into the middle of the road, if you don't step one side, and allow this lady and myself to pass unmolested!" replied Minnie's escort, and at the same time he essayed to step forward, when, without further parley, the three men sprung upon him.

The attack was made so suddenly that the young man was hardly prepared for it. Minnie still had hold of his arm, and both were pressed back against an iron railing which ran alongside of the corner house. But this advantage of the three assailants was only momentary. Quickly disengaging his arm from Minnie's, the young hero whispered in a low, quick voice, "Don't scream, Miss Lamont!" and before Minnie could wink, the three young fellows who made the attack lay sprawling in a heap upon the sidewalk.

#### CHAPTER IV.

READER, we are about to describe the groupings of a picture, wherein we shall not draw upon our fancy but present living characters, framed in a series of ordinary surroundings, which may be daily witnessed by the curious; ay, many of you pass daily under the very windows, through which the sun sends its impartial rays upon the scenes of horrid iniquity, which must cause smiles of triumph to irradiate the countenances of approving demons. We wish to introduce you into the interior of a gambling-den, where a "day game" is played. This den is situated in the very heart of the business portion of the city, upon the second floor of a building, all other floors of which are occupied by honest dealers and manufacturers. Adjoining this building, on either side, and opposite also, are the business places of various merchants, who, in the excitement of trade, hardly realize how much mischief and misery finds its use in such close proximity. They are accustomed to see fancily dressed men lounging about the entrance of this place, and are probably aware of what kind of business is transacted upon that sumptuous second floor. They may frequently casually observe all classes of men enter and pass out, generally accompanied by one or more of these slick, diamond-bespangled statues, who haunt the vicinity. These sleek-looking fellows are in reality human "birds of prey;" and although they assume a nonchalant and careless attitude, they are really intently scanning the faces of every passer-by, seeking for a "gambling flock." Long practice has educated them into such a skillful use of their peculiar faculties, that one quick, apparently unmeaning look is sufficient for their purpose. These rascals know their man at a glance. Persons passing along the street, who have frequently looked up suddenly, prompted by that instinctive feeling which warns them that they are being scrutinized, and who have encountered the quick, ferret-like glance of one of these seemingly well-to-do gentlemen, scarcely realize that in that one brief flash-like look they have been measured and weighed; little do they dream that those observant and well-trained eyes have settled the question as to their eligibility to become dupes. It would cause the hair to stand upon the heads of even some of our oldest and most experienced citizens, if one well posted should take half an hour's stroll with them during the busiest hours of the day, and after calling their attention to these individuals, whom they have been in the habit of meeting daily, disclose by what means these gentlemanly-looking scamps obtain their livelihood.

Passing through one of these crowds of broad-cloth-clad human sharks, we will enter the place

and take a glance at the interior, and watch for a moment their *modus operandi* for plucking infatuated insatiable birds. In the back room we find all the sumptuous appointments of an elegantly furnished drawing-room. Beautiful lace curtains depend from the massive and gorgeously gilded cornices; sandwiched between these costly festoons of lace is a magnificent mirror which reaches from floor to ceiling. Heavily carved divans, chairs, and sofas are arranged about the room with exquisite taste. The most prominent piece of furniture is a grand sideboard. This magnificent article occupies one side of the room, and upon it are displayed finely cut decanters, splendidly tinted, long-necked bottles of various colors, and dozens of dainty glasses, which shine and sparkle like crystals. There, also, in rich profusion, are all the most costly appurtenances of a bijou bar. A nod to one of the sleek, white-aproned colored chaps, who hover about this tempting display, reveals the fact that there, in plentiful abundance, is the falsely called generous liquor, for the purpose of stimulating the courage of those who pass into the front room and cast upon that treacherous faro-table their earnings, sometimes their stealings, and too frequently their all. As we have no intention of slipping into the fatal vortex, we will not require any stimulant, but proceed into the other room and see what is going on.

At the center of the far side of the table sits the dealer, a hardened, imperturbable fellow, who has for years witnessed, without one throb of sympathy for the victims, the ruin of hundreds of young men. There are but three parties playing against the game at the time we enter, and an experienced person would have at once discovered that there was really but one genuine player, the other two being merely decoys. These two played with an easy nonchalance and apparent indifference to either failure or success, which presented a striking contrast to the terrible excitement evinced by the young gentleman whom they were thus subtly leading on. This young man, as betrayed by the occasional remarks dropped by his companions, had just previously enjoyed a wonderful run of luck; but now the tide had changed, and all of his previous winnings had been scooped back by the indifferent dealer. Hundred after hundred of his original capital had rapidly disappeared also, until—the moment when we first behold him—his last stake has been played. A fearful expression, indicative of intense anxiety, rests upon his countenance, as card after card is slipped from the box, and the fate of his stake still remains undecided; but at length the deciding card is slipped, and discloses the fatal figures which announce his loss. A fearful oath bursts from the lips of the youth as he snatches his watch from his pocket, wrenches a diamond pin from his shirt-front and slings them across the table, as at the same time he exclaims:

"Lend me three hundred on those."

"Had you not better 'switch off' for this afternoon?" blandly inquired the dealer, as a well-simulated smile of encouragement and kindness rippled over his hideously scarred face.

"No, no, I'm going to smash this streak, or bust something," cried the youth.

Well did the wily dealer know that this would be the answer, as he reached over the amount demanded in checks. With a dreadful oath, the young man staked half of these checks upon his first play; in a moment they were raked in; when with another and still more fearful oath, which elicited encouraging plaudits for his gameness from the other players, the frenzied youth laid down all of the balance. A few seconds and this, too, is raked in.

"You've got an awful bad streak, young fellow," observed one of the three players.

"You just bet I have," replied the beguiled youth, with a sickly smile; "but I'm going to get square yet," and as he said the latter, he removed the diamond sleeve buttons from his cuffs, and at the same time plunged his hand down in his coat breast-pocket and brought forth a very curiously wrought massive gold neck-chain. This, with the diamond cuff-buttons, he threw upon the table, and called for more checks.

As the heavy chain fell with a peculiar click upon the table, a strange and singular glitter brightened the eyes of a plain-looking old man, who, throughout the whole play, had been an eager watcher of the game.

As the eyes of the dealer fell upon this remarkable-looking chain, he shook his head doubtfully, and said:



"I guess I won't advance you any more checks to-day. Luck's dead against you; you had better break game until to-morrow."

"That's my business," replied the youth, fiercely; "you just give me the checks."

"Not to-day," replied the dealer, firmly; "you've played enough."

This time the gambler was in earnest; a sudden, undefined reluctance had come over him. There was something so peculiar in the formation of the links of that strange-looking chain, that a weird impression of some tragic history connected with it caused a superstitious repugnance to take such a strong hold upon him, that he determined not to receive it. Finally the youth's persistence caused the gambler to forget for a moment his usual imperturbability, and he replied, fiercely:

"We play for money here; this ain't no pawn-shop. This is a game for gentlemen who have money and play for amusement."

"So have I got money!" exclaimed the youth. "Not just at this moment," he continued; "but I had a good stake when I came in. I've lost it here, and I want a chance to get square!"

"I'll give you your money back, if you're sick and want to squeal," said the gambler, in a tone of stinging contempt, and a manner properly cutting for the purpose of irritating just such a nervous and inflated disposition as the young player, who answered, quickly:

"I ain't sick, and don't want to squeal. I offer you double security for the loan!"

At this moment the old man previously mentioned as having been an attentive spectator of the game, spoke up and said:

"Look here, young man, that's a curious kind of a chain you've got there, and as the gentleman don't want to advance on it, will you sell it to me? It ain't exactly the kind of chain a young gentleman like you would wish to wear, and I have taken quite a fancy to it; I will buy it if you will sell it to me."

Upon being thus addressed by the antiquated-looking old man, the excited young gambler turned toward him and said, sharply:

"It will take considerable money to buy that chain, pop; are you pretty well fixed?"

"I guess I can raise all it is worth."

"What has started you on such a lay as to want to own that chain, anyhow?" observed the youth, suspiciously.

"Oh, I don't want it particularly," replied the stranger, carelessly. "You seemed bent on shoving it with the dealer here, and as he don't seem inclined to advance on it, I thought probably you would like to sell it, that's all!"

"Will you give a hundred for it?" inquired the youth.

"Let me see it first," replied the prospective buyer, and he reached over and took the chain from off the table. As he did so, a keen observer would have noticed a singular gleam which for a moment lighted up his eyes as he examined the curious workmanship. While balancing it in his hand, as if gauging its weight, the old man looked up suddenly and said:

"You have a perfect right to sell this, haven't you?"

An angry flush mantled the youth's cheeks, as he replied: "If I hadn't a right to sell it, I wouldn't offer it for sale. That chain is mine, and it's yours, if you have a spare hundred you are willing to give for it?"

"All right," said the old man, "I'll take it," and plunging his hand into his breast-pocket, he drew forth a large, old-fashioned wallet, from which he took five twenty-dollar bills; at the same time he placed a small slip of paper and a pencil before the young man, and remarked in a matter-of-fact manner, "Just give me a bill of sale."

For an instant the youth hesitated; then as he saw the dealer about to commence a new deal, he seized the pencil and hurriedly wrote out a bill for the chain. This he signed, while being keenly watched by the buyer, Emsley Merritt, Jr. Upon receiving the bill the old gentleman passed over the notes, wrapped the chain in the bill, and deposited it in his pocket-book; and a few moments later, when young Merritt had again become immersed in the excitement of the game, he arose and passed quietly out. That innocent-looking old man was Sleuth, the detective; he had found a clew, a tangible clew, whereby to trace the robber of the rich banker's treasure-vault. The most prominent article which the banker had de-

scribed as most likely to betray the thief, the

keen old Sleuth had purchased from the banker's son while in the gambler's den.

## CHAPTER V.

REHEARSAL had just concluded. Minnie Lamont, the now famous *prima-donna*, was passing up the center aisle of the theater toward the front entrance with the intention of entering the box-office, when she was suddenly confronted by a rather strangely dressed, but pleasant-faced old man, who arose from one of the seats, and stepped right in front of her, plainly indicating by his manner that he was about to address her.

Supposing that he was one of the usual bewitched old fellows who are frequently seen lounging about theaters, for the purpose of quibbling a bit with some one of the actresses, and who intended an impertinent self-introduction, Minnie drew to one side, and with an indignant flush was about moving disdainfully by, when the old gentleman inquired in quick, sharp tones, and in a precise manner, which ill comported with his rustic appearance:

"Have I the honor of addressing Miss Minnie Lamont?"

"That is my name, sir," replied Minnie, before she was hardly aware of what she did. Still there was such a benignant expression upon the old gentleman's face, that instinctively she felt that he had some direct business with her. Added to his kindly look, was the peculiar emphasis with which the inquiry was made; and as Minnie answered, she stopped short, and gazed upon her interlocutor with a surprised and inquiring look.

"My name is Sleuth," said the stranger.

The announcement caused Minnie to nod in recognition of the name, as the old man continued:

"Young Mr. Harry Loveland has presumed upon the liberty of giving me a letter to you."

Minnie now gave evident signs of excessive nervousness; to her there was something terrible in the very name of Old Sleuth, as he was called; this name having been associated with several notorious and recent tragic events, as the great ferreter of the criminals. Although, at times, this name had been in the mouths of the whole community, still the individual himself was so ubiquitous that few persons, and only those professional detectives, knew him personally, and even then there was a weird mystery about him which his most intimate associates had never been able to fathom. His disguises were known to be so numerous and perfect, that he was a perfect Nemesis and terror to evil-doers. Thus it was that the mention of this terrible name caused Minnie to pale and tremble all over.

We will here state that the young Harry Loveland alluded to by Old Sleuth was our young friend of a former chapter, who so bravely and nobly rescued this beautiful *prima-donna* on the night of her *début*, from the assault and disgusting attentions of Emsley Merritt, Jr.

Since that night the acquaintance, begun under such romantic circumstances, had developed into a warm friendship, and promised to terminate, as matters were going, in a still closer relationship. Every night succeeding that first eventful one, Harry Loveland had been a frequent escort to Minnie, to and from the theater. During this intercourse Harry had learned much of Minnie's previous history, and there were some events connected with her career which suggested to Harry the advisability of her putting the facts together in the form of a manuscript, for the purpose, as he stated, of submitting them to some experienced detective. Minnie having delayed from day to day the writing of these various details, Harry had at last determined to force matters, by sending his friend, Old Sleuth, to take an account of the mystery connected with her previous life from her own lips. It was in accordance with this request that the detective came upon her thus abruptly as related.

Minnie's nervous agitation for some moments was so great, she hardly knew what to say; her beautiful face alternately paled and flushed, and her lovely eyes indicated a state of momentary bewilderment. At length, however, the detective's kindly tones and reassuring manner partially soothed her, and her agitation somewhat subsided. After several indifferent remarks, Sleuth approached the subject which had inspired his visit, by saying:

"I suppose, Miss Lamont, you are aware of the purpose of this interview?"

Minnie instantly replied; "I think I am, but I fear my friend, Mr. Loveland, has founded some very wild hopes on very slender threads of evidence; and I am rather abashed at the idea of presenting the very meager facts on which these hopes are founded, to such an experienced officer as yourself."

"My dear young lady, I am a warm friend of Harry, and have a very high opinion of his native keenness; the fact that he has solicited my aid, convinces me that he has been attracted by sufficient evidence whereon to found a theory. I have heard a portion of your story from him, and, as I understand it, at the time that your father so mysteriously disappeared, he had a very large sum of money upon his person."

As Old Sleuth said this, he stopped, and ran his eye keenly about the room. Observing that their colloquy was attracting attention, he requested Minnie to step aside within the shadow of one of the columns which supported the gallery. Having withdrawn beyond the range of direct observation, Old Sleuth resumed, and said:

"Had you been surrounded by friends at the time this misfortune befell you, the mystery attending your father's disappearance might have been solved with less trouble; still there is something so remarkable about this disappearance that I still have hopes that we may succeed in partially unveiling the mystery. If I am correctly informed, you were very young at the time this occurred."

"Yes, sir; I was but nine years old, and although rather advanced in my studies, and considered quite precocious, still I had not sufficient experience to know how to proceed."

"Did no one interest himself in your behalf?" inquired Sleuth.

"Yes," answered Minnie, "a lady and gentleman, who were slightly acquainted with my father, instituted a few inquiries, but did not succeed in getting the least possible clew; they kept me with them for about six weeks, and then, having to return to California, placed me in an asylum, and so arranged matters that my father could readily find me in case he should return. From that day until this, with the exception of Harry Loveland, I have encountered no one who took any special interest in my affairs."

During this statement Sleuth leaned against one of the columns in a thoughtful attitude. When Minnie had finished, he said:

"Do you recollect whether the gentleman who took temporary charge of you inquired at the bank and discovered whether the checks your father had about his person when he disappeared had been presented for payment?"

"I do," replied Minnie; "I went back to the bank with him; there we ascertained that the checks had been drawn upon the sixth day subsequent to the day when I last saw my father."

A strange look passed over the detective's face upon hearing the statement. He said nothing, but waited for Minnie to proceed. At length he inquired:

"Do you know whether the officers at the bank were acquainted with your father personally?"

"They were not," Minnie replied; "but they informed us that he had brought a letter of introduction establishing his identity from the confidential clerk of one of the most prominent banking-houses in Wall Street."

A look of still greater interest irradiated the face of the detective. Minnie had stated that there was nothing whereon to build a theory, but already the active brain of Old Sleuth was laying together thread upon thread and weaving out a strong chain of evidence whereby to form a theory. For a moment he seemed lost in thought, but at length again spoke and said:

"Was any inquiry made regarding the personal appearance of the party who cashed the checks, and did his description agree with the personnel of your father?"

"Young as I was," answered Minnie, "I made that inquiry myself, and there was a certain remarkable discrepancy between the appearance of the party who cashed the checks and my father. From that hour until now, I have never got rid of the conviction that it was not my father who called at the bank. From the description, I could make out that the man who cashed the checks resembled my father in almost every minor particular, but my father had only one eye; the man who called at the bank had not lost an eye. I questioned closely concerning this, as up to that moment I had every reason to believe that it was my father



himself that drew the money, but the loss of his eye was such a remarkable disfigurement that a person who once saw him could not fail to notice and recollect that defect. The teller of the bank was positive that the man who drew the checks had a pair of glittering black eyes. My father had but one, and that was a clear blue."

"Have you a picture or miniature of your father?"

"I have a small miniature," replied Minnie; "it was painted about a year before my father disappeared, by an artist in California."

"California?" inquired Sleuth, "was your father a resident of that State?"

"Yes, sir, I was born in San Francisco; my father was a native of New York State, and had always indulged a hope of returning to his native State and purchasing a farm. Shortly after my mother died, he sold his property and came East for the purpose of carrying into execution his long-contemplated plan. That was how it happened he had such a large sum of money in his possession. He disappeared the very afternoon of the day of our arrival in this city."

While Minnie was speaking she removed a gold-cased miniature, attached to a curiously wrought chain from her neck, and handed it to the detective. As Sleuth took it in his hand, he gave a sudden start, and displayed a powerful emotion, seldom permitted to so strikingly evidence itself during his many wonderful surprises in the course of his exciting and perilous business. Minnie observed his unusual agitation, and immediately a pallor overspread her features, and she was seized by a sudden faintness, as she exclaimed:

"Oh! pray sir, what startled you? Do you recognize the miniature?"

Sleuth's excitement was but momentary; whatever it was that so suddenly startled him, he had no intention of betraying his emotion; and in an instant he recovered his self-control as he answered, with an attempt to assume an air of indifference:

"No, I do not recognize the picture: I never saw it before, but a fact in connection with it occurred to my mind at that instant, and I was momentarily surprised at a certain singular coincidence."

"Does that trinket furnish you with any special clue?" inquired Minnie, anxiously.

"I will be frank with you," replied Sleuth; "it does, but I must have time to connect matters in my mind; in the meantime I beseech you upon no account to lose sight of, or run any risk of losing, that miniature and chain."

The detective put a decided emphasis upon the noun chain—"It may prove an important link in a chain of evidence which I am gradually welding together. But one more question: Is your present name your real name, or a professional *nom de plume*?"

For an instant Minnie hesitated, and her lovely face evinced considerable perplexity; after a moment, she said:

"Is it positively necessary for me to answer that question?"

"Your hesitation, my dear young lady, satisfies me that my surmises are correct; Lamont is not your real name. It is necessary that I should know your real name; but you may rely upon my honor that I will not disclose it, not even to our friend, Harry Loveland."

Again, for a moment, Minnie seemed lost in meditation. At length she leaned forward and pronounced in a low, but distinctly audible voice, another name.

Upon hearing this, the old detective a second time exhibited considerable emotion, which he signally failed in concealing. Upon observing this second exhibition of surprised recognition of some familiar fact, Minnie exclaimed:

"Oh, sir, your constant surprises at little matters of seeming non-importance cause me great astonishment, and I am led to believe that you possess some facts that you have not disclosed to me."

"Well, miss," replied Sleuth, "I will admit that the several statements have been to me the greatest surprises that I have encountered in my whole professional career; but as to your suspicion that I possess any facts beyond those which you have disclosed, it is incorrect; but I will see you again. I have much to think over and much to talk to you about at a future interview; for the present I will leave you, with the injunction that you must not be surprised, nor refuse to see me at any time, at any place, or upon any occasion. And if I should suddenly appear to you under circumstances when you least expect it, you must endeavor to control your surprise, if you experience any. I will

still further warn you, that I may not always appear to you in the same character. Upon the whole, I can assure you that this, professionally, has been a very satisfactory interview, as concerns the unraveling of the mystery attending your father's strange disappearance. In the future, as now, it will be necessary that our interviews shall be without listeners. You will frequently hear from me through our mutual friend, Harry Loveland; and, as I am an old man, you will excuse the liberty, and exculpate me from any ulterior motive, when I assure you that Harry Loveland is a man of honor, and one whom you can trust and rely upon under any circumstances. You can remember these words, but don't let Harry know that I have been sounding his praises, as the boy's modesty is a very prominent trait in his composition. Good-day."

For a few moments after Old Sleuth's departure, Minnie remained in the same position, lost in deep reflection. Had she been less intensely immersed in her own thoughts, she would probably have observed a shadow which was thrown upon the rear wall from behind an adjoining column. When Minnie turned and passed out, the substance of this shadow stepped from behind the pillar, in the shape of a short-haired, bull-necked man, with sharp, ferret-like eyes. In the face of Sleuth's assertion, as to the privacy of their interview, this individual had been a witness, and had overheard the major part of the conversation. And that he was there for a purpose was plainly indicated when, in following after Minnie, as she passed out, he gave a peculiar and knowing wink, as if congratulating himself on the acquisition of some pleasing intelligence.

When Minnie mingled with the crowd upon Broadway, this muscular-looking rascal kept upon her track, and shadowed her to the very door of her residence.

After her entrance, he advanced boldly, took a card and pencil from his pocket, noted the number, took a deliberate survey of the surroundings, and then turned and proceeded rapidly toward Broadway.

## CHAPTER VI.

In a gorgeously furnished apartment upon the second floor of an elegant mansion which faces the well-cultivated grounds of a public benevolent institution, upon a damask lounge reclined Miss Minnie Lamont, the beautiful *prima-donna*. As Miss Lamont is our heroine, we suppose as a matter of course, as writers of true facts, we are bound to describe her personal appearance, but we are not about to do any such thing. Thousands of our readers have already recognized the lady, and have seen her so often upon the stage, that if we should attempt to describe her numerous attractions, you would accuse us at once of having failed in doing justice both to her beauty and eminent talents. Therefore we will content ourselves by assuring those of our readers who do not recognize our heroine, or have never had the good fortune to see her, that Miss Minnie Lamont was one of the most beautiful women that ever appeared behind the foot-lights; and never did she appear more beautiful than upon the occasion above described, as her usually cheerful expression was tinged by an air of sadness which lent to her features an additional charm.

Everything about the room which she occupied bore testimony to her taste and refinement. Little articles of *virtu* were arranged here and there, and in fact, there was nothing lacking which would tend to adorn the abode of a person of exquisite taste. The arrangements all indicated that a cultured brain had guided the hands that placed each article in position.

As previously stated, the expression and attitude of the lovely occupant of this elegant *boudoir* was one of seeming sadness and anxiety.

Suddenly a step upon the stairs warned Minnie that some one approached, and she immediately arose, and, woman-like, summoned a cheerful expression as she tripped across the room and adjusted her hair before the mirror. She had but just time to do this when a gentle tap at the door announced the correctness of her surmise.

A pleasant "come in" was answered by the entrance of a fine-looking gentleman, who was none other than Harry Loveland, the brave-hearted young fellow who had so gallantly defended her from the assaults of young Merritt.

As Harry entered the room, Minnie extended her hand familiarly and exclaimed:

"Is that you, Harry?"

"It's me truly, my lady Minnie," replied Harry, with equal cordiality and intimate freedom.

"Well, I am glad that you have come," said Minnie; "you seem to have settled complacently into the position of my guardian angel, confidant, and counselor."

"It is my pleasantest consciousness," replied Harry, "that you permit me to occupy either of these relations toward you, and—"

"Never mind," interrupted Minnie, playfully, "don't waste your distinguished abilities in trying to offer any acknowledgements. In fact," she continued, and the sad expression again rested upon her countenance, "I am in trouble, or rather I feel that there is some unseen danger threatening me. I was just thinking over a few singular circumstances that happened within the last few days, and straightway my fears turn my thoughts toward that gallant gentleman who once before acted as my champion in a moment of great terror. So you see, Mr. Champion, I was thinking about you a moment before, and, lo! in verification of the old adage, you are here."

"Not in the character, I hope, to which the adage refers," answered Harry, laughingly.

The reader will perceive by the foregoing conversation that these young people had progressed to a position of considerable intimacy; and although Harry's handsome face was beaming with pleasant smiles, still the startling announcement of some impending danger, coupled with the sudden change of the expression upon Minnie's countenance, caused him considerable anxiety; and a moment later this anxiety was betrayed, as he said, in a quick, decided tone:

"Has that young rascal, Merritt, been shadowing you again?"

In answer to this inquiry, Minnie said:

"I do not know whether he is the true source of my present alarm or not; but I know that I am being shadowed and watched. I see the same villainous-looking face everywhere I turn, and I was just wondering whether I had been discovered as the daughter of my father; and whether I am selected as an additional victim, to add to the details of some fearful and deadly mystery."

"Come, sit down, lady Minnie," said Harry, encouragingly, as he led her to a divan, "and give me a connected account of these startling circumstances which have caused you so much disquiet and alarm. In the first place," continued Harry, "have you seen my friend, Old Sleuth, the detective?"

"I have," replied Minnie, "and I connect the subject of my present alarm with my attempt to bring the mystery surrounding me to your friend's attention."

"In what manner?" inquired Harry, quickly.

"You know you told me to write out the details of the circumstances as far as I recollected them; I did so."

"Well, did you give them to Sleuth?" inquired Harry.

"I did not," answered Minnie; "and here comes the first mishap—I carried the paper containing those details with me to the theater a week ago last Tuesday night, with the intention of handing them to you. If you recollect, you failed to meet me upon that occasion and act as my escort home. I have not seen that paper since that night; I fear I must have dropped it at the theater."

For a few moments Harry pondered, but at length said:

"I don't see anything remarkable about that; it is not probable that anybody who should find it would see anything remarkable about that paper."

"Nor I either," replied Minnie; "and yet, suppose, by a wonderful coincidence, that paper should have fallen into the hands of the very person specially interested in learning those details!"

"Who could there be interested in learning those details?" inquired Harry.

"It's a mystery upon a mystery; and yet, ever since my interview with Sleuth, my mind clings to the impression that my father was murdered for his money, and, strange as it may seem, I can not rid myself of a feeling, that, through that manuscript, I have been identified as the daughter of the murdered man."

"That is a singular impression to be founded upon so light a basis; but tell me what are the direct causes which produce this instinctive feeling that your father's murderers are about, and have any special interest in discovering your identity?"



"This only," replied Minnie: "ever since the day following the loss of that manuscript, a ruffianly looking fellow has shadowed me everywhere."

"Probably some scamp," said Harry, "that this young villain, Emsley Merritt, has set to dog your tracks."

"I have tried to think that," Minnie asserted, "but coupling this immediate shadowing after the loss of that document is what startles me and leads me to think that there is some more deadly purpose in this dogging of my movements."

At this moment, further conversation was interrupted by a tap at the door. Upon opening it, Minnie beheld one of the servants of the house, who handed her a card, and stated that the gentleman was waiting below in the parlor. Minnie glanced at the card, and immediately a deadly pallor overspread her face as she bade the servant wait; and, going toward Harry with trembling nervousness, she passed the card to him, and exclaimed:

"Good heavens! what can this mean?"

As Harry took the card in his hand, and read the name, he, too, evinced considerable emotion. After a moment he said:

"This is certainly strange."

"Had I better see him?" inquired Minnie. After a moment she continued: "I can't conceive what possible business Emsley Merritt, the great banker, can have with me!"

"I can," cried Harry, "or rather," he said, stopping suddenly, "I—I—" for an instant he stammered, then suddenly seizing Minnie's arm, and looking sternly into her eyes, he exclaimed: "Minnie, can you trust me?"

"Trust you—how?" cried Minnie, in surprise.

"Trust me so far as to arrange that I can be a witness to this interview between you and this Emsley Merritt."

"How can I arrange it?" inquired Minnie, "he most probably wishes to see me alone."

"That is where I wish you to trust me," replied Harry. "You're a woman; you don't know—this mystery seems to thicken. Minnie, I would only ask this for your own safety, in case of some possible contingency. I connect this visit of Emsley Merritt with this villain who has been shadowing you. There ought to be a witness to this interview, to serve some future development. Minnie, you trust me—you must hide me. Receive this man in this room, and let me be an unseen listener. There may be ugly features connected with this arrangement; but as your friend, Minnie, forgive me, I speak earnestly—your more than friend. Quiet your repugnance to this seeming breach of propriety and honor; your safety demands it!"

"Oh! what shall I do?" cried Minnie. "What strange significance do you attach to this visit?"

"It matters not now," replied Harry. "For your own sake I insist that you accede to my request."

"Harry, I will."

This conversation had been carried on between the two in an audible voice. Minnie now proceeded to the door, and told the servant to request the gentleman to walk upstairs. A moment later Emsley Merritt, with the exclamation, "My dear child, I have been seeking for you," entered the room.

## CHAPTER VII.

UPON the same afternoon, after Minnie's interview with Sleuth, the detective, as related, a villainous-looking fellow tracked her home, who, after having taken a note of her residence, started down town. Shortly after, we find him entering the office of Emsley Merritt. The great banker was evidently expecting this fellow, and upon his entrance, motioned for him to close the door, and eagerly scanned the ruffian's face as he said:

"Well, sir, do you bring me a more satisfactory result of your movements than you have heretofore?"

"I guess I ain't no slouch, Mr. Merritt," replied the man; "I told you to be patient and I would fetch things out all right, and I tell yer I've just kept my word. I've got information which will make your hair stand."

An indignant flush tinged the banker's cheeks, and a contemptuous smile wreathed his features as his visitor advanced, shrugging his shoulders and winking familiarly. Emsley Merritt was a proud man; it was exceedingly galling to him that circumstances made con-

tact with such low ruffians necessary, but certain facts had recently come into his possession of such a startling and wonderful character that the lofty man was compelled to lower himself to a level which he had hoped he had risen above forever.

Certain discoveries had shaken his proud nature, and developed the long-hidden, desperate qualities which he possessed, which fitted him for almost any work when his good name and personal safety were at stake. These and more were at stake now.

Emsley Merritt, after years of prosperity and assured security, suddenly beheld at his feet a dark chasm of terrible possibilities, which at any moment might culminate in his ignominious downfall from the high position he had attained. Though this high-strung man felt compelled to employ tools whose remotest contact was obnoxious, still he did not intend, if possible, to place himself in their power, or permit the least approach toward familiarity.

The fellow who now stood in the presence of the banker was one of the very sharpest of this class of villains. It had been a regular godsend to him to have his services in demand by such a wealthy man as his present employer; the fellow had discovered at once that something very important was at stake. He necessarily had received sufficient information to get a finger-nail hold, and he had now determined to get a full grasp upon the banker. He was well aware that the information he had obtained was startling and valuable, although he did not have the least suspicion of the full extent of its importance. Yet he determined only to disclose his information by dribbles, intending to use it as a wedge as he gradually advanced into the confidence of his employer. This is why he dared to assume the confident and familiar manner which so evidently greatly annoyed the banker, and caused the latter to say:

"Look here, Halpin, I wish you to remember that I am acting for another party in this matter, and I have no special interest in what you have to communicate on my own account. I hope you will make it part of your business to relate facts as directly as possible without trying to enhance their importance by comments; allow me to be the judge of the value of what you have to communicate."

"That's all right, boss, but you know that some facts are worth more than others to parties who are seeking for knowledge. I've done a big day's work to-day. I've got big information, I want big pay."

"I am prepared to pay liberally for what information you may have, and I don't think that you ought to complain in advance."

"It ain't the money I care so much about, boss; but I don't want to go to this thing blind; I want you to let me drop a little into your game."

"If you are as smart as you pretend to be," said the banker, significantly, "you'll pick all it's necessary for you to know in rendering me your services. I repeat to you, that I am acting for others. We will pay you liberally, but we don't expect to make you a confidant more than is necessary for business. Did you see this girl to-day?"

"I did, boss; and that's the reason I wanted you to take me into your confidence, for your own sake. I don't know your hand, but I tell yer that air gal is playin' a full hand ag'in yer."

"Playing a full hand against me?" cried the banker, suddenly springing to his feet, and turning deathly pale, "what does she know about me?"

"I don't know, boss, but she's taking advice of those who know how to play every card."

The banker was mystified; he saw at once that there had been some development that he could not understand.

For some moments he meditated, while Halpin watched him with a keen intentness, being convinced more and more of the importance of his information; and he, too, was bothered how much to reveal, so as to play his own points to advantage. For a full minute neither spoke; at length the banker said:

"I only partially understand your allusions; you had better tell me a straight story of just what has occurred since I saw you last."

"Well, boss, I guess that's the clearest way to get at it. I've been laying around the theater, piping this girl back and forth for two days, and nothing unusual occurred until this afternoon, when, just as she was coming out after rehearsal, she was met by a singular old gentleman, well known about town. I dropped on it at once, that something was up. Soon as I saw this old chap go for this Miss Lamont, I knew

something big was up. I laid low till he drew her one side, out of ear reach; that old fellow never talks business afore anybody, and I wonder I caught him napping to-day; but I got a position where I overheard a big part of their conversation. I made out that this here girl's father had been murdered some—"

Here Halpin stopped, the usually calm and collected banker, upon hearing the last clause, sprung to his feet, with his eyes rolling restlessly, while his bloodless lips twitched nervously as he clapped his hand over his heart, and essayed to speak, but evidently labored under too powerful emotion to do so. Upon witnessing the terrible emotion of the banker, a singular look of eager inquiry gleamed in Halpin's eyes as he said, deliberately:

"What's the matter, boss, you seem excited? Didn't I tell yer I had big information?"

"For Heaven's sake, proceed, proceed!" exclaimed the banker.

"Well, yer see, as far as I could make out, this here murdered man was the gal's daddy; he had just come from California, and was murdered for a big pile of money and checks he had on his person. The rig seemed to be on the cashing of the checks; it seems that the gal was the only one who dropped on the notion that her father had been murdered, from the fact that her father had only one eye, which was blue, and the checks were cashed by a chap who otherwise resembled her father, with the exception that he had a pair of glittering black eyes, and—" by some singular and unexplained impulse, the fellow added, "just like yours, I reckon!"

"You scoundrel!" cried the banker; "if you make any more such allusions, I'll smite you dead in your tracks!"

"Lordy, old man!" cried Halpin, "it strikes me you're takin' things awfully to heart; but if you'll just hold yourself in hand a minute, I'll finish up. You see, all this was brought out from the gal by questions from the old chap that was interviewing her; he kept pretty cool, this old fellow did, till he asked the gal if she had any picter or photograph of her daddy; and yer see, she went down in her bosom and brought out a locket fastened on to the queerest-looking old chain I ever saw. And when the old fellow saw this chain, he looked like a man struck with sudden death. I never saw the old fellow excited before in my life, but I tell yer he looked wild when he took that chain and locket in his fist!"

From the moment that Halpin had alluded to the chain, the banker had fairly gasped, and when the narrator ceased speaking, he said, in a husky voice:

"I'll give you a thousand dollars if you will tell me the name, without any further circumlocution, of that old man that was with Miss Lamont!"

"Done, boss, that old fellow was Sleuth, the great detective!"

"Sleuth!" fairly shouted the banker, as he sprung to his feet and clutched wildly at space for a moment, and then fell back insensible upon the floor, as the door opened and Old Sleuth himself entered the office.

## CHAPTER VIII.

AN ugly look overspread Halpin's face as he rushed forward, raised the banker in his arms, and turned and glared at Sleuth. The old detective glared also; he was surprised, and what is more, at fault. He did not know Halpin, although he at once recognized that the fellow was a ruffian. Although Sleuth did not recognize Halpin, the latter individual instantly recognized Sleuth, and murderous thoughts flashed through his mind as the conviction forced itself upon him that most probably Sleuth had overheard sufficient of his conversation with the banker to establish certain conclusions. But an instant intervened for the flashing of these thoughts through the minds of both, before the clerks, who had heard the cry and fall, came crowding into the room. Sleuth quickly decided that it was policy for him to withdraw. He was exceedingly desirous of fathoming the object of this singular interview, which had such a startling termination; but his usual caution prevailed, and he concluded that it was better to defer his inquiries for the present; consequently, in the midst of the confusion, he quickly withdrew. As Sleuth retired, the banker began to exhibit signs of returning consciousness. In answer to the hurried inquiries of the clerks, Halpin had informed them that Mr. Merritt was greatly affected by some important



information which had been communicated to him, and the result was that he had fainted.

"But I guess he's all right now," observed Halpin, as the banker opened his eyes. When raised and seated in a chair, Mr. Merritt motioned for his clerks to retire. As soon as they had left the office he signaled Halpin to lock the door. As the latter turned toward the banker, after having done as directed, a singular and significant smile rested upon his features, as he said:

"It is all nonsense for you to pretend no personal interest in this little game. I tell yer right out, I have dropped on enough to know that you are the party most concerned."

"It makes little difference now to you who is concerned; at present I have no need of any further information. I will admit that the information that you have given me is very important—yes, important to me, as far as my interest is centered in another. But for the present, I wish this interview to close—it is my place to pay and yours to keep to yourself anything that has transpired here. I will direct my cashier to pay you what price you may fix upon as proper and full remuneration. If I want your services further, I will communicate with you."

"What do you mean, boss?" exclaimed Halpin, roughly; "are you goin' to hist a feller that way? There's a little thing occurred, while you was in your fit, that you ain't posted on yet; I guess it might help you in thinking over matters!" said Halpin, abruptly.

"What was it?" inquired Mr. Merritt.

"Well, just the time you keeled over, Old Sleuth came in here!"

"May be Sleuth has business with me, unconnected with anything in which you are concerned. He will probably come again. I tell you, Halpin, I'll have plenty of business for you, but I wish to be alone for the present. Come here in the morning between eleven and twelve."

"All right, boss; I'll be here; but if you try to play double, I'll hedge. I'm awful to drop on a double. Good-day."

And with this partial warning and threat, the wily ruffian departed. As the door closed upon him, the old banker muttered:

"My God! what is coming? am I haunted by baseless terrors, or are my sins finding me out?" After a moment he continued audibly: "I accidentally found a roll of manuscript, while in a theater watching the wayward footsteps of my son. I read this manuscript and found it to contain the main points of a singular story. There is nothing in the narrative which bears directly upon any circumstances in my life; and yet, shadowy terrors have pursued me ever since the perusal of that manuscript, so strangely found. That name—that name! how should any person happen to seize upon that name in such a connection? If it was a coincidence, it is the most remarkable one I ever encountered; and yet I should have attached no importance to that, had it not been that a few moments later I beheld that young *prima-donna* come upon the stage, and then—oh! my God! that strange resemblance—that indistinct shadowy outline of a ghostly face. Strange—strange! this Minnie Lamont lived for months under my roof, and this singular resemblance never struck me. And then that chain—and Sleuth—oh! heavens! But I must shake off this spell of terror at once. There is not a circumstance but which may belong to a thousand other parallel cases; it is nothing but my weak fears. But—" and the banker hesitated, his whole frame quivered, his face became positively livid as he tremblingly exclaimed: "I have nothing to fear but Sleuth; that man may yet prove my evil genius. Why did he betray any emotion when this lady passed him that miniature and chain. That man stands in my way; let him beware; I shall investigate this thing."

At this moment there was a rap at the door. By a powerful effort Mr. Merritt regained his self-possession, as he bid the party to "come in." The person seeking entrance proved to be his son. After a few moments' ordinary conversation, the father said in an abrupt manner, which surprised young Merritt, it being so unlike his father's usual mode of address:

"Emsley, I wish to have a few moments' private talk with you."

Young Emsley now for the first time noticed a marked change in his father's appearance, and he exhibited considerable nervousness as a premonitory anticipation filled him as to the subject of this private talk. But instead of hearing his father launch forth with some startling accusation, he was astounded when his father in-

quired in a significant tone, which suggested possibilities which the youth had not previously dared entertain for a moment:

"Emsley, my son," said the father, "do you honorably and truly love the beautiful young songstress, Miss Minnie Lamont?"

"Why do you ask, father?"

"Simply," replied the father, "because I have your best interests at heart. Some time since I received information, which induced me to keep a watch upon your movements. I will deal frankly with you, and I expect you to do likewise with me. Tell me truly, exactly how matters stand between you and this elegant young miss."

"I will admit, father, that Miss Lamont has engaged a large share of my attention lately."

"Have you reason to hope that your attentions are agreeable and satisfactory to her?" inquired the father, eagerly.

"Under certain circumstances I have reason to believe that my attentions would be extremely agreeable."

"Have you received any encouragement?"

"I can't say that I have; but I attribute this to our different positions, and my not having directly proposed an honorable engagement. It is possible she doubts the honor of my intentions."

For some time nothing further was said; the father reflected, and the son began to feel exceedingly uneasy; he was not fully satisfied as to which line of conduct his father was most pleased with; but he was not left long in doubt. The banker at last said:

"If you had my approval, would you wish to make this lady your wife?"

"My dear sir, before committing myself, as you promised to deal frankly with me, I wish to ask what your answer would be if I should answer your last question affirmatively?"

"My answer," replied the father, "would be, that, owing to certain associations which I see you have lately contracted, it would be a very pleasant relief to me to see you married and settled. In thinking over matters I have come to believe that Miss Lamont possesses personal and mental advantages which overbalance what she lacks in social position. I would be gratified to welcome her as a daughter."

"Well, father, this has come rather suddenly upon me; I shall want time to think this matter over. I am young yet—yet I love Minnie. I will be prepared to give you an answer to-morrow."

## CHAPTER IX.

It is not possible to describe the astonishment and the variety of emotions which agitated Minnie, when the proud old banker addressed her in such a fatherly and familiar manner. Her agitation was so excessive that she was unable to reply, or even extend to him the ordinary courtesy of a request to be seated. The old banker was quick to observe this, and a gratified expression at once exhibited itself upon his countenance, as he thought he recognized this as an indication of his coming power over her. Without waiting for her to invite him, he said, coolly:

"My dear, as I have come to have a long talk with you, I will be seated."

After addressing a few inquiries as to her health, etc., Mr. Merritt finally said, abruptly:

"My dear, when did you last see my son?"

"I am not in the habit of seeing your son at all," replied Minnie, disdainfully, suddenly conceiving that she understood the purpose of the old banker's visit. In answer to the look of surprise which the banker assumed, Minnie continued:

"I have never sufficiently valued the privilege of beholding your son to attempt the taxing of my memory upon so unimportant a matter."

For a few seconds an embarrassing silence prevailed; at length the banker said:

"Revelations which my son has made to me led me to anticipate an entirely different answer."

"I do not know what is the nature of the revelations concerning me, which your son has made; but," and Minnie's face hardened, her eyes gleamed with a defiant light as she added:

"His conduct on the few occasions in which I met him was of such a brutal character that, had I been other than a friendless orphan, he should have been made to smart for it."

"My dear Minnie, I have been terribly misled. There exists some dreadful mistake concerning the object of my visit to you, or for

some unexplained reason you are misleading me."

"Sir, to me all of these words are meaningless; I have not the faintest conception of what you mean."

"Well, then, let us each be more explicit. We are drifting from a proper understanding of each other; but I will tell you plainly the object of my visit, and what are the circumstances which brought me here, also the purpose I have in view. You must remember that Emsley is my only son, the prospective inheritor of my wealth and name, also, that, as a father, under these circumstances I am greatly interested in everything concerning him. His interests are mine. Prompted by paternal anxiety, and knowing the temptations surrounding a young man in a city like New York, I was led to secretly watch his movements and the class and character of his associates. By this means I came to learn that he was a regular visitor at the theater where you are now engaged. I visited the theater and there recognized you upon the stage, and I at once suspected the motive which led him there so constantly. I wish to assure you that I was more pleased than otherwise upon discovering the attraction which led him there. I was afraid that it was a less worthy motive. The day following this discovery I had an interview with my son, and at length succeeded in gaining from him a confession that my suspicions were correct. Emsley openly avowed an honorable love for you."

"Indeed!" said Minnie, in icy tones.

"I was much gratified upon hearing this frank declaration, I assure you, Minnie, and I hope this assurance will make you equally frank; my son has my unqualified approval of his choice."

Upon receiving this assurance, advanced in such a confident manner, Minnie was prompted to follow her first impulse, and indicate at once her scorn and contempt for the banker's son; but a recollection of the ignominious manner in which she had been driven from the banker's roof induced her to withhold the expression of her contempt until she should learn what potent spell had wrought such a remarkable change in the banker's sentiments. Therefore she said:

"Your words astonish me; have you forgotten the cause for which I left your house?"

"Minnie, let by-gones be by-gones. You must allow something for the anxiety and sudden shock of a parent. Whatever my wife's feelings were at that time, they have become considerably modified since. Love for her child makes her unselfish; she desires his happiness only, and joins me in my hearty approval of our son's choice."

"This is all very strange to me. To a family like yours I should judge that my present vocation would make me even more obnoxious, and such an alliance more distasteful than before."

"You overlook, Minnie, the fact that we considered our boy's affections merely a brief fancy. We now find that it is the strong love of a noble nature. Although we would both have preferred that this discovery had been made before you went upon the stage, still the happiness of our son is our chief object; and though your position is not what we would desire, still, personally, I am proud to say we have no objection to offer."

"Thank you," said Minnie, "but in consulting my happiness and desire of your son, don't you ask you have failed to consider mine?"

The banker twitched his eyebrows upward as he said, with an air of astonishment:

"It can not be possible for you to refuse such an alliance as we offer you."

"I do," replied Minnie; "I positively reject such an alliance."

"Why, why, my dear child? What can you be thinking of? Is it possible that you fail to recognize the full value of such an alliance?"

"I do!"

"Then you positively reject this honorable offer of marriage?"

"I certainly do; and in spite of your vaunted wealth and position, I will frankly say that, considering the character of the husband you offer me, I consider your proposition an insult to my womanhood!"

"Then, young lady, this is a positive rejection; instead of making me your friend, you desire to make me your enemy?"

"Does it necessarily follow that because I refuse an alliance with your family I make you my enemy?"

"It does; not simply because you refuse this



alliance, but because of the leniency exercised toward you, and for the manner in which this leniency has been repaid. You well know the crime which places you in our power, and knowing this, you know how much more bitter are the insults you have heaped upon me and my family.

"Crime, sir!" exclaimed Minnie, her eyes dilating and her face blanching to a sudden paleness. "Crime, sir!" she repeated, "what do you mean? What foul trick is this? Be careful, Mr. Emsley Merritt; although backed by the power of wealth, I tell you beware! I am not as friendless now as when ignominiously turned from your door. Don't ever dare to mention the word crime to me, lest you may be called upon to prove your insinuation—lest you be unmasked—"

At this remark, "lest you be unmasked," Emsley Merritt started as if stung by an adder. His face became as pale as Minnie's. A look of terror for an instant succeeded the sinister glitter of his eye.

Minnie was too excited to notice this momentary change in the expression of the banker's face, as she repeated:

"Yes, sir, beware lest you be unmasked and proved a greater villain than your son."

"I doubt not, young lady," hissed the banker, "that your stage education enables you to assume this air of tragic indignation to throw out spiteful insinuations; but I warn you that you are standing upon a precipice. Before I knew of this infatuation of my son, suspicion pointed to you as the author of a certain crime. I had you shadowed; I had your daily walk 'piped,' as the detectives call it, and all my suspicions were confirmed. I gathered proof enough to establish a charge of crime against you and send you to prison. I give you but sixty seconds to reconsider; love for my son makes me do this; and if you don't recall your words, I'll crush you. I await your answer."

"Mr. Merritt, I despise and defy you; do your worst!"

For an instant the banker cast his eyes restlessly about the room as if instinctively observing whether there was any possibility of his being overheard; then he advanced toward Minnie, and said:

"For your sake only I will not speak aloud; lend me your ear;" and as he spoke, he leaned forward and whispered a few hurried, rapid words.

Without a word, poor Minnie wilted, and before the banker could catch her, she fell senseless upon the floor.

## CHAPTER X.

THIS startling result of his whispered communication was unexpected by the banker, and for a moment he was considerably frightened, but he knew that something must be done. So he rushed across the room to a toilet-stand, and seized a goblet of water, and kneeling beside her, commenced bathing her forehead. While thus employed, his eye suddenly rested upon the links of a curious chain which was clasped about her neck. At the sight of this the expression of his face became perfectly frightful. He cast his eyes instinctively about the room to see if he was observed, and he caught a glimpse of his own livid features in the mirror.

With the quickness of a flash he seized the fatal chain, nervously unclasped it, unwound it from her neck, and was about rising to his feet with the stolen necklace in his grasp, when an iron hand was fastened upon his neck and another upon his wrist, and the necklace fell to the floor at the moment Minnie revived.

"You hoary-headed rascal! you gold-mounted thief! How dare you attempt this high-handed robbery?" The speaker was Harry Loveland. In the adjoining room Harry had overheard every word of their conversation. He also thought he heard a fall, but concluded that he must be mistaken. Listening more attentively and hearing no other sound, he became exceedingly anxious. The silence continued so long that he could not bear it. He accordingly passed from the room where he was into the hall, and so around into the room where Minnie and the banker were.

Fortunately he arrived just in time to witness the attempted theft, and prevent the wealthy old scoundrel from secreting the trinket about his person. The firmness of the grasp prevented the banker from speaking, and Harry suddenly flung him to the other side of the room. He then took Minnie in his arms and laid her upon a sofa.

By this time the banker had recovered both his breath and nerve. He advanced toward Harry Loveland, his features distorted with fury, and exclaimed:

"You scoundrel! are you aware whom you have assaulted?"

"I am not," replied Harry, "beyond the fact that I prevented the perpetration of a daring robbery by one whose appearance would not betoken such an atrocious act."

At that moment Minnie exclaimed: "Oh! mercy! Harry, I've lost my chain and locket." "No you haven't; fortunately I arrived just in time to prevent your losing it."

"How? how? Good heavens, who could want to rob an orphan of her only memorial of her father?"

During these words Emsley Merritt had stood glaring from one to the other with a fierce, baleful light gleaming in his eyes. He now spoke, and said:

"Young man, had you waited to have heard an explanation of my action, you would have acted very differently. That necklace is my property."

"It's false! it's false!" cried Minnie.

At that moment Harry handed her the necklace.

"It's false! it's false!" she repeated, as she unclasped the locket. "Behold, Harry!" she continued, extending the miniature toward him, "this is a portrait of my poor dead, murdered father. The chain is a portion of one he had made expressly from a nugget of gold taken from a mine in California by himself. The other portion my poor father had on when he disappeared. Oh, that the dead could speak, or that the living robbers of his dead form would only give me, of all they robbed my parent, the remainder of this chain. I feel—I know—I need it now—it may save me from much suffering!"

The banker had recovered his self-possession, and said:

"Well, sir, if I am to suffer from trying to recover my own property, it is well; but I shall make the attempt," and the banker moved toward the door.

"All right, old man, but you look out for Sleuth. I'll make suggestions to him, if he don't conceive them himself, and my impression is that you'll have enough to do to look out for yourself. There'll be a human sleuth-hound on your past career. You know whether it will stand the test."

Raising his clinched fist, and shaking it as he went down the stairs, Emsley Merritt muttered hoarsely: "It would have been better for you, young man, if those words had never been spoken."

"Oh, Harry, Harry!" cried Minnie, when the banker had gone, "what does all this mean? My God! mystery, mystery, mystery, nothing but mystery and sorrow for me, and I never harmed a worm!"

"Minnie, darling," cried Harry, throwing his arm about her waist, and for the first time imprinting a kiss upon her pure brow, "fear nothing; the threats of that old man are as innocent of mischief as the murmur of those dead leaves rustling on yonder tree. You have nothing to fear, and everything to hope; but keep that chain, darling. I must go now; cheer up, I will call for you to-night at the theater, for I must see Sleuth at once."

## CHAPTER XI.

THAT same night Harry Loveland was on his way to the theater according to his promise. When opposite Bryant's Minstrel Hall, he heard his name called from across the street, and upon looking over, he saw Dan Bryant beckoning to him to cross over.

As Harry reached out his hand to grasp that of his friend Bryant he observed that Dan was laboring under some apparent excitement.

"What's the matter, Dan?" said Harry, "you're looking rather white about the gills."

"Harry, something very startling has just happened. I tell you, old man, it gave me quite a start. About fifteen minutes ago, I was coming out of the Hall, when I noticed a coach, driving faster than usual, coming up town. The driver was lashing his horses so fiercely that it attracted my attention. Just as the coach got about opposite me I heard, or thought I did, a smothered scream, and at the same instant, as the coach came under the full glare of our big light, I saw the horror-stricken face of a woman, just for an instant, at the coach glass. In

that momentary glance I witnessed the most agonized expression I ever beheld, and if I ain't mistaken, Harry, I recognized the face."

"Good God!" cried Harry, "who was it?"

"Minnie Lamont," replied Dan, "as true as I live; but I've sent down to the theater to find out if she is there or not."

At the mention of the name of the lady, Harry Loveland staggered like one stricken by a blow. At that instant a youth came rushing up to Dan Bryant, and exclaimed:

"Miss Lamont left the theater about twenty minutes ago."

"Which way did the coach go, Dan?" cried Harry.

"Straight up Broadway, as far as I could see it."

And Harry started to go up Broadway at a brisk pace, but after proceeding a few steps, returned and procured the description of the coach and driver from Bryant, and then hurried off.

At different points along Broadway, he inquired of the police and occasional pedestrians as to whether they had noticed the coach. By this means he had traced it to Fourteenth Street, down Fourteenth Street to Third Avenue. From this point he could obtain no further trace of it; but determined not to give up the chase, he continued up Third Avenue, making constant and minute inquiries as he proceeded, hoping to obtain another clew.

A note was placed in Minnie's hand as she had just left the stage for the last time, after having responded to several encores. Hastily opening it, she read as follows:

"DEAR MINNIE,—Sudden business prevents my coming for you to-night; and fearing that it may be dangerous for you to go home alone by stage, I have sent a coach, with a trusty driver. You had better enter it as soon as possible after your duties are over. I will see you in the morning. Don't fail to leave by the coach at once, as we do not know what danger you might otherwise encounter."

"Yours,  
"HARRY."

Minnie had never seen Harry's handwriting, and consequently was unable to detect anything wrong by that means. It took but an instant to don her street attire, and a few minutes after having received the note she passed out. She saw a coach standing at the door, and inquired of the driver if that was the coach sent by Mr. Loveland.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the driver, springing from the box and opening the coach door.

Minnie entered, the door was slammed to, the driver remounted his box, and drove off. After proceeding a block and a half from the theater, the coach drew up to the sidewalk suddenly, and stopped. Before Minnie could recover from her surprise and astonishment, the door was opened, and a strange man entered. Minnie's attempted scream was instantly smothered by a handkerchief, saturated with chloroform, which was thrust in her face, which produced instant unconsciousness. The author of this brutal outrage was followed into the coach by another individual. Again the door was slammed to, and the coach was driven off at a much faster rate.

In an instant Minnie revived, and threw herself from her seat against the glass window of the coach, hoping to attract attention, but she was instantly drawn back, and again the handkerchief was thrust in her face. The poor girl knew nothing further until the coach stopped and she was assisted out.

Then, with a feeling of abject horror, she saw that they were in a lonely, unsettled district; she was being led down a road-way which had not yet been graded, and was merely a rough cut through a bed of rock.

As soon as she had sufficient strength, she tried to scream; but one of her conductors grasped her by the throat, and muttered hoarsely:

"Look here, miss, don't you attempt to open that fly-trap of yours!"

"Oh! pray, sirs, tell me, what is the meaning of all this?"

"You'll find out soon enough, miss, and it wouldn't do you any good if we was to tell yer."

At this moment one of the men stopped suddenly, and after listening a moment, exclaimed:

"Thunder and lightning! pardner, there's a step as sure as your name's Halpin."

"Some one on his way home only, I guess," replied the person addressed as Halpin. "We'll just lay low here a minute, and let 'em pass."



Minnie suddenly recollected the words of Harry: "Protecting eyes are always watching you." This conversation of the two villains gave rise to a faint hope that the fact of her being decoyed had been discovered, and friends were in pursuit. The eyes of the villains were upon her, and their menacing expression warned her that it would be dangerous to attempt an outcry, yet she determined to risk it. But the villain stopped any such design by seizing her roughly by the throat. As they listened, the steps grew nearer.

Seeing no place where they could hide, Halpin said to his companion, in a low, coarse voice: "It can't be helped, Bill, you will have to lay back and see about that cuss, anyhow—'tain't no use to take no chances."

Minnie's heart fairly stopped beating as the ruffian slipped a bludgeon from under his coat, and moved stealthily back to strike down the rapidly approaching person, who was now within a hundred feet of them, and who she instinctively believed was her rescuer; yet on he came, evidently unconscious of the presence of the crouching assassin, who lay in his path ready to spring upon him ere he had time to prepare for the danger.

## CHAPTER XII.

With her heart fairly stopped, Minnie awaited, expecting every moment to hear the deadly blow struck, possibly to be succeeded by cries of distress; but instead, with a wild throb of sudden hope, she heard the clear tones of a firm voice exclaiming:

"Stand! you rascal! don't move, or I'll scatter your brains on the wall behind you," and as she jerked her head around upon hearing these words, Minnie saw in the clear starlight the gleam of the polished barrel of a pistol, which a tall old man held, pointed toward the fleeing form of his intended assailant.

In an instant the person approaching was beside her. She immediately recognized Sleuth.

"Young lady, are you hurt?" he inquired, hurriedly.

"I am not," replied Minnie.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Sleuth.

"I am so thankful!" murmured Minnie, "and—"

"Never mind, my dear miss," interrupted Sleuth, "I know, of course, you're thankful; that's understood; but come, we're not safe here a minute; that villain Halpin may have a score of confederates near here."

Catching Minnie's arm within his own, Sleuth led her rapidly up the rough road-way. Sleuth noticed her failing strength and the increased feebleness of her steps, and stopping suddenly, he said:

"I fear you can proceed no further on foot, but we are in great peril; you must dismiss all scruples and let me carry you."

As Sleuth finished, he raised Minnie in his arms. Just at that moment he was surrounded by several rough-looking customers, the foremost of whom exclaimed, as he flourished a bludgeon over the old detective's head:

"Put that young lady down, yer ould villain. What do you mane, stalin' a young lady right off the streets in that manner? Put her down, I say, ye ould rascal."

Sleuth knew the men he had to deal with, and he answered by thrusting a pistol forward, and at the same time he observed, firmly:

"You lads be off about your business, or I'll nip one or two of you!"

At this moment the party was re-enforced by a burly, red-headed, bull-necked fellow, who, as he came up, exclaimed:

"What is the matter wid yez? what the devil's goin' on here?"

"Go about your business," returned Sleuth.

"Troth an' this is my bizness," replied the fellow. At the same time he snatched a bludgeon from one of the others and added: "Come, now, will yer giv' up the girl?" at the same time he advanced nearer, flourishing the club.

"Your blood be upon your own head!" shouted Sleuth; at the same instant he fired. Then with a wild yell of agony the fellow fell upon the ground with the exclamation: "Be jabbers, boys, I'm shot!"

At this instant two policemen rushed upon the scene, and the gang, picking up their wounded companion, fled.

"What's the row here?" cried the foremost.

"Whatever row there was is over now," answered the detective, and as the second police-

man joined them, Sleuth gave an account of all that had transpired.

It was near morning when Sleuth reached Minnie's home with her. During the journey home he had ascertained from her all the recent facts, and had advised her as to the course she should pursue.

Upon the afternoon of the following day, Harry Loveland called upon Minnie, and received a statement from her of all that had occurred. He also informed her how, through means adopted by him, Sleuth was put upon her track, and fortunately arrived in time to effect her rescue. While he was still there, there was a ring at the door, and an instant later a heavy step was heard coming up the stairs. It stopped before her door, and was succeeded by a firm rap. Harry stepped to the door, and opening it, beheld a person whom he at once recognized as an *attaché* of one of the police courts. The man said:

"I have come to see a woman by the name of Minnie Lamont," at the same time he attempted to force himself past Harry into the room; but Harry placed himself in front of him so as to prevent his doing so, and said:

"You must explain your business, sir, before entering here."

"That's easily done," replied the officer; "I have a warrant for her arrest on a charge of theft."

Harry turned his face into the room, and beholding Minnie standing in the middle of the floor with her hands clasped and in an attitude of intense agony, he said: "Don't be alarmed darling, this is all for the best; I would rather have this matter brought to an issue in this manner than have you endangered as you have been heretofore."

The officer at the door interrupted him by exclaiming, fiercely, "Look here, young man, I just want you to move out of the way and let me attend to my business."

"Oh, Harry! let him come in," cried Minnie as she saw the determined look on the officer's face.

"In one moment, Minnie," he said; then, turning toward the officer he made a significant sign, which the man seemed to understand at once, for his whole manner changed, and when Harry closed the door and stepped out into the hall with him, he made no opposition. A low, hurried conversation ensued between them; Harry whispered something in the officer's ear, which caused him to assume a positive air of deference, as he said:

"All right! you know how it is: I didn't recognize you, and 'knucks' are up to all kinds of dodges."

"That's all right, officer," replied Harry; "you can just read your warrant, and I'll see that Miss Lamont appears in answer to the summons," and Harry opened the door and introduced the officer into the room, when he read the warrant, and politely bowed himself out of the room. After his departure, Harry said:

"I will accompany you to and from the theater to-night. You have had sufficient experience now to have become somewhat accustomed to sudden surprises and imminent dangers. The past ten days have clearly demonstrated a purpose to get you out of the way by some means, and I charge you to be suspicious of everybody and everything except Sleuth and myself, therefore, my dear girl, you must be alert and brave."

"I thank you, Harry for your generous devotion to my interests; you are a man, strong and vigorous and hopeful; I am a woman, weak and friendless, and consequently hopeless."

"Why, Minnie, I shall get angry if you talk in this manner; you call yourself friendless; why, my dear girl, is it possible that you have not yet discovered that your interests are dearer to me than my own, or rather, that yours are mine?"

"Oh! I know, Harry, that your generous nature has made them so, but still that does not alter the fact that I am an orphan, without a known relative in the world."

"Well, there, birdie, if I didn't know your ingenuous nature, I should believe you were driving me to a positive declaration."

At this remark Minnie started back, and her face became suffused with blushes.

"Oh, Harry, Harry!" she murmured, "if I thought you believed at heart what you have just said, I would never look upon your face again."

"Minnie, darling, I was spurred a little by the words that you spoke yourself; I thought you must have known ere this that my interest

in your affairs was not unselfish, darling. I love you, not as a friend, not as a brother, but with that selfish, yet tender love which a man can only once feel. I thought that you ought to have known this, and when you spoke about being friendless, I was a trifle nettled. But you will forgive me—I know you will—and from hence there will be no misunderstanding. Don't you ever again feel that your interests are cherished upon such a slender basis as mere friendship; you are just as near and dear to me as though the words had been spoken which shall give me legal authority in your affairs."

Minnie's emotions for a moment were too excessive to allow her to reply; at length she murmured, "Oh, Harry!" but the tone and significance expressed in her manner were sufficient for him.

## CHAPTER XIII.

HARRY LOVELAND accompanied Minnie to and from the theater that same night, according to promise, when he informed her that Sleuth would probably manage to keep the previous night's occurrence from the public, and nothing was said at the theater about the matter; consequently none of the actors were aware of the exciting adventures through which their favorite had passed.

Upon the following day the dread realities of her present existence presented themselves in full force. Early in the day the officer who had served the warrant called and informed her, in a very gentlemanly and decorous manner, that it was necessary for her to accompany him to court in answer to the summons.

Twenty minutes' drive brought them in front of that famous building, the Tombs.

Minnie was led into the railing, and as she looked about the court-room from behind her veil, her eyes did not rest upon a familiar friendly face. There were Emsley Merritt, his wife and son; also a woman whom she recognized as Mrs. Merritt's housekeeper. Besides them, and the officer who had accompanied her to court, there was not a face that she had ever gazed upon before.

For a moment after she had become seated there was a dead silence, when suddenly the clerk of the court called in the usual monotonous manner: "Merritt vs. Lamont—are the parties present in court?" A sleek, well-dressed, elderly man arose, and announced that he was there to appear for the plaintiff; at the same moment a man of fine presence, with a sharp, shrewd expression of countenance, despite his full, broad face, arose, and announced that he was ready in behalf of the defendant. After a few moments' whispered conversation between the clerk and the justice, the judge announced his readiness to proceed with the examination, when the counsel for Mr. Merritt arose and requested that gentleman to take the witness stand and be sworn.

The substance of his testimony was that shortly after the dismissal of Miss Lamont from her position of governess, a chain and locket were missed. Then, for the first time, the housekeeper confessed to having seen the article in Miss Lamont's possession. The plaintiff had subsequently employed a detective, who traced the chain into defendant's possession. Not wishing to destroy the defendant's character, the plaintiff had gone to Miss Lamont and demanded restitution of his property, intending, if successful in obtaining it, not to prosecute; but he had been received in a most violent and contemptuous manner, and personally assaulted by a young man who assumed to act as champion for defendant.

Producing the chain and locket, which had been put into the possession of the court by the officer who made the arrest, the judge said:

"Witness, are you positive as to the identity of this chain and locket?"

"Positive!" exclaimed Mr. Merritt, at the same time reaching eagerly forward to grasp the chain, but the judge replaced it in his drawer, with the remark that it was time enough to surrender the chain when the examination was concluded. Mr. Merritt was now directed to vacate the witness chair, and Mrs. Merritt was called to take his place. Counsel for the plaintiff asked Mrs. Merritt if she recollected having the defendant, Miss Lamont, in her employ. Witness replied that she did.

"Do you recollect the circumstance of her discharge, and the discovery of the loss of the chain immediately after?"

"I do," answered the witness.



"You will please state what further knowledge you have regarding the loss of the chain!"

"As soon as I learned that the chain was missing, I suspected Miss Lamont, and began making inquiries as to whether any of the servants had seen the missing articles; I then ascertained that the housekeeper had seen it in Miss Lamont's possession."

"That will do, madame," remarked the plaintiff's counsel.

"One moment," said Minnie's lawyer, who for the last few moments had been conversing with Minnie. Questioning the witness, he said:

"Madame, do you ever recollect having seen that chain worn by Miss Lamont while a member of your household?"

"No, sir," replied the witness; "*I never saw that chain before in my life, until I saw it here in court.*"

"That will do," cried Minnie's counsel. In the meantime the counsel for the plaintiff had sprung to his feet, and was attempting to make some kind of an explanation, but in a loud voice Minnie's counsel continued:

"Your honor, we demand that this case be dismissed; *she had never seen that chain before in her life until she saw it in court.*"

"That is certainly what I understood the witness to say," observed the judge.

"Your honor," cried the counsel for the prosecution, "this is a misunderstanding; our witness did not mean to imply that she had never seen the trinket before, but that she had never seen it upon the defendant in her life."

After some further wrangle between the counsel, the judge interfered, and addressing the witness, said:

"Madame, did you mean to say that you never saw this chain before?"

The witness's confusion was so great and she was evidently so completely bewildered that she did not know what answer to make. At length she stammered:

"Of course I have seen it before—I intended to say—I had never seen it upon Miss Lamont's person in my life."

Minnie's lawyer now held a few moments' further conversation with her; in the meantime, Mrs. Merritt had deserted the witness stand, and the housekeeper had been sworn. Counsel for plaintiff had just commenced questioning the witness when the conversation terminated between Minnie and her counsel, and with a grim smile the latter resumed his seat. The questions addressed to the last witness were very brief, and were only directed so as to confirm the fact of her having seen the chain in the defendant's possession.

"That will do," remarked counsel for the plaintiff; "you can step aside, madame."

"Not yet," cried Minnie's lawyer. "When and where did you see that chain in the possession of Miss Lamont?"

"I was in her room one evening when she voluntarily showed me the chain and locket, stating that the portrait was one of her father."

"What more did she tell you?"

Witness hesitated.

"That's irrelevant, and I object," exclaimed Mr. Merritt's counsel.

"Your honor, this witness admits that the defendant voluntarily exhibited this very chain and locket in the house, where, it is now claimed, it was stolen from. The presumption is preposterous that she would have done this were the property not clearly her own. The object of the last question is to prove, by plaintiff's own witness, that in his own house, months before she was driven from it, she gave the same account of the history of this chain and locket, as we can prove she did, to the plaintiff when he came and tried to wrench it from her person while in an unconscious state—unconsciousness being the result of the plaintiff's own violence and brutality. We will prove, your honor, that the really guilty party is the plaintiff, who, for reasons of his own, is anxious to obtain possession of the trinket now in possession of the court. We will prove that he was caught with it in his hand, while in the very act of wrenching it from the unconscious form of defendant."

If a bomb-shell had exploded in court, it could not have produced a greater excitement than did the present phase of this remarkable case. After a few moments' consideration, the judge decided the question regular, and directed the witness to answer.

"What did Miss Lamont say to you upon that occasion?"

"She said that that chain and locket were the

only relics she had of her father, who was murdered—" witness stopped.

"Go on," said Minnie's lawyer, "what more did defendant say?"

"She said it was part of a chain which her father had had made expressly; and that the balance he wore when he disappeared."

"One more question. Did you not once, at the lunch-table, call Mrs. Merritt's attention to that chain and its history?"

The witness now was completely gone; if she had been schooled for her part, she had evidently forgotten her instructions; the last scene had spoiled her, and, after a moment's hesitation, she answered: "I did call Mrs. Merritt's attention to the chain."

"Did Mrs. Merritt request to see it?"

"She did."

"Did Miss Lamont show it to her?"

"She did."

"Did Mrs. Merritt say anything at that time about the chain being her own property?"

"She did not."

"When did she first tell you that that chain was hers?"

"The day before yesterday."

"I hope your honor is allowing all this to be impressed upon your memory; here is the clearest development of the most monstrous conspiracy that ever came under my observation. I don't think there is any necessity of proceeding further with this examination on the strength of the testimony of plaintiff's own witnesses. I demand defendant's discharge."

"There is certainly something very strange and mysterious about this whole affair. For strange suggestions, it is the most remarkable examination I ever held. I am satisfied that wherever the mistake may lie, if mistake it be, that the defendant is innocent—innocent beyond a doubt, and I hereby honorably discharge her, with an expression of my sympathy for the inconvenience and annoyance to which she has been subjected."

"Your honor," said Minnie's lawyer, as Harry Loveland entered the court-room, and offered his arm to escort Minnie out, "your honor," he repeated, "for reasons, we will not request at this time warrants against certain parties for perjury and conspiracy; for the present the result of this examination have been entirely satisfactory."

And, happier than she had ever been before, Minnie was driven to her home.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

For two days succeeding the examination, nothing occurred in Minnie's experience of an exciting character; but upon the third evening, in company with Harry, she attended a grand ball given by the Protective Order of Elks.

Late in the evening Miss Lamont arrived, accompanied by Harry Loveland, and, as the couple appeared upon the floor of the ball-room, a buzz of admiration ensued, and Minnie was at once universally pronounced the belle of the evening.

Shortly after supper Harry excused himself for a few moments, and left Minnie conversing with another lady. Shortly after his departure, the lady with whom she was conversing was led away by her partner, and Minnie was left alone; but considerable time passed and Harry had not returned, and she began to grow uneasy, and finally commenced making inquiries.

Passing rapidly across the room, she was suddenly confronted face to face by Emsley Merritt, Jr. Minnie moved quickly to one side, and proceeded in the direction whither she was going without observing the singular look which young Merritt's companion flashed upon her from out a pair of glittering black eyes, nor the significant manner of the two as she brushed by them.

Minnie found the dressing-room deserted; a single gas-jet was burning, which only partially lighted the large room. She was surprised at finding no attendant present. Securing her hood and cloak, she stood for a moment arranging them before the mirror, when suddenly she saw reflected in the glass the back of a lady as she stepped across the room.

Her first impulse was to turn about and face the person, whoever it might be; but that instinctive feeling which constrains a well bred person from exhibiting eager curiosity caused her to refrain, and she remained in the same position before the glass, when suddenly the gas was turned off, and she found herself in utter darkness. She imagined also that she heard a

click, as if the door had been closed and locked, but felt that it was hardly possible that this could be the fact, as any person doing it designedly must have known that the slightest outcry would have brought hundreds to the room, and also that at any moment persons were likely to come.

Turning about, she said, in a clear, firm voice: "Who is here?"

At that instant she heard the rustle of silk near her; and at the same time a hand was placed upon her shoulder, like a person reaching out in the dark. As the hand came in contact with her shoulder, Minnie heard a voice say:

"Is there anybody here?"

It was the voice of a female. Minnie answered:

"Yes," and at the same time she felt the hand stealing over her neck.

"I am so frightened," said the strange lady. "Do please light the gas, I am almost frightened to death. I am trembling all over. Excuse me, but do let me cling to you, or I shall fall, I am so nervous."

The tones were so natural, and the circumstance so conducive to just such a condition, that Minnie's suspicions were completely allayed, and with the stranger still clinging to her, she felt about for matches. While doing so, she felt the hand moving nervously over her neck and shoulders, and although it caused a disagreeable sensation, still attributing it to the lady's excited condition, she paid no attention, but groped about in search of the matches.

In a moment she secured some, and with the stranger still clinging to her, moved toward the center of the room under the chandelier. Upon finding it beyond her reach, the stranger said:

"I will get you a chair to stand upon." In a moment Minnie felt a chair shoved against her. Arranging it under the chandelier, she stepped upon it, struck the match and lit the gas just at the moment a party of ladies entered the door. As she stepped down from the chair, she turned around to see who the person was who had been in the room with her, and was astonished to find that beside herself and the party who had just entered, there was not a soul in the room.

A few moments later the truant Harry turned up. On their way home in the carriage Minnie related the strange circumstance to him. Harry came to the same conclusion as the others, and assured her that it was merely a freak of her imagination, owing to her state of mind, and to the depressed condition of her nervous system.

At this moment the carriage stopped in front of Minnie's door. Passing up into her room, Harry turned on the gas at the moment Minnie threw off her opera cloak. As she stood in the bright light, Harry turned toward her with a bantering phrase upon his lip, when suddenly his whole countenance changed, and he exclaimed:

"Good heavens! Minnie, where are your chain and locket?"

Minnie raised her hand to her neck, and not finding it there, said, deliberately:

"It's gone; the matter is explained; the ghost has my locket and chain."

#### CHAPTER XV.

EMSLEY MERRITT sat alone in his office. The wealthy, proud, hard man of the world looked much older than when first introduced to the reader as a successful financier. The lines had deepened upon his face, and the general expression was haggard and wan, though his eyes still glittered with a keen sharpness, heightened by a watchful and half-terrified look, as though expecting at any moment a disagreeable surprise.

Upon this occasion, he was evidently waiting for some one. At times he would arise from his chair, and pace hurriedly back and forth across his office. Occasionally he would mutter to himself. The banker's soliloquy was at length interrupted by the entrance of his son.

As young Emsley came into the office his father gave him a searching glance, and after a moment, said:

"My son, I have been robbed."

Young Merritt turned to a deathly paleness upon hearing this abrupt declaration. His father noticed it, and the first glimmer of a terrible suspicion flashed upon his mind. The expression upon his son's countenance had caused him to stop. He now resumed, and said:

"Owing to the fact of a series of robberies, I have been compelled to employ several detectives. One of them, a low fellow, but very



shrewd and sharp, the other day addressed to me a very singular and startling remark. He said, 'It will stand you in hand, Mr. Merritt, to look after that kid of yours.' This is a very vulgar expression, Emsley, but it is fraught with a very weighty meaning. Now, young sir, I wish you to tell me frankly, and to borrow this low fellow's phrase, I will say that it will stand you in hand to tell me precisely the ground which induced the detective to make such a singular remark."

"I have nothing to confess," replied Emsley, doggedly.

"Are you a gambler?" inquired his father, abruptly.

"I have played, but not enough to call myself a gambler."

"And you met with losses—and robbed me to make them good."

For a moment the old banker's emotions completely overcame him. The hardened, ambitious financier really loved his son. Seeing his father was thus overcome Emsley was compelled to make an open confession, and he said:

"Father, if you will forgive me, I will confess everything."

"Do so, my son, do so! and if the past will only prove a warning to you, I shall not be entirely hopeless. I am ready and willing to forgive you, if you disclose everything, and sincerely promise amendment. I am willing to make allowances for your youth. Answer me truly, did you misappropriate money belonging to me?"

"Yes, father, I did."

"Did you take that chain out of my safe?"

"What chain, father?"

"There was but one there, a massive, curiously wrought chain—did you take it?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"What did you do with it?"

"I pawned it."

"In a regular pawn-shop?"

"No, sir, I pawned it to an old gentleman whom I met in the gambling-saloon; I was broke at the time and wanted to get square. I offered to pledge the chain with the dealer, when this old gentleman, who had seen me lose heavily, volunteered to make me an advance upon it."

"What kind of a looking old man was he?" inquired the banker, as the old look of terror settled upon his face.

Emsley described the old man, when the banker staggered back into his chair, exclaiming: "Good heavens! as I suspected—it was Sleuth! My son! you sold that chain to my deadly enemy! I am a ruined, disgraced man!"

At the name of Sleuth young Emsley trembled.

"The great detective," continued his father, "he knew well who you were. He was dogging your steps; he entered the gambling-saloon because you entered it—he was watching you—he was looking for that chain."

At that moment there was a knock at the office door. Emsley unlocked the door under his father's direction, when one of the clerks informed the banker that there was an old man who wished to see him privately.

"Show him in," said the banker, hiding all signs of his previous emotion. A moment later, Sleuth, the detective, entered the banker's private office. As he entered the door, young Emsley whispered hurriedly in his father's ear, "My God! father, that's the man!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

As Sleuth entered the office he said, shortly: "Good-day, sir." At the same time he glanced keenly about the room, and finally fastened his eye upon young Merritt. There was a peculiar twinkle in his eyes as they rested upon the youth.

"I expected to have seen you before, sir," said the banker.

"I was not ready to make any report—I am not now unless we can be alone," and he nodded his head significantly toward young Merritt.

Young Emsley reached over, and whispered in his father's ear:

"Let me offer to buy the chain back; he couldn't refuse to resell it under the circumstances."

Mr. Merritt merely answered:

"Never mind, leave that to me," and then motioned for his son to leave.

Emsley obeyed. As the door closed upon him Sleuth arose and said:

"If you have no objections, I will turn the

key in the door. When I disclose my business I don't imagine that you will desire to be interrupted any more than I do."

Sleuth turned the key in the door and resumed his seat. As he did so he said:

"Mr. Merritt, your last directions to me were, when you put this robbery case in my hands, that I should follow any clue that I obtained, no matter where it pointed. I did so, and I have been successful. I have found the thief."

"Ah, I thought you would; a man of your reputed keenness is not apt to fail. Have you arrested him?"

"I have not," replied Sleuth. "I wished to consult with you first. The guilty party is one whom you would never have suspected. I didn't know exactly how you would wish to proceed."

"Well, sir, who is he?"

"The person is your own son, Emsley Merritt, Jr."

Not a muscle of the banker's face changed upon receiving this announcement. Sleuth now again strongly suspected that, after all, the banker knew whom he was about to charge with the robbery. The banker made no reply, and after a moment, Sleuth said:

"Were you prepared, sir, to hear your son charged with the robbery?"

"I was not," replied the banker, "nor do I believe it now, upon your simple statement; you must furnish me proofs before I believe my son to be a thief."

"I have the proofs, and they are positive."

"What are they?"

"I found some of the stolen property upon his person. I purchased the chain, which you described, from him, in a gambling place—he was offering to pledge it to the dealer, who refused to take it, and I bought the chain."

"Why did you not bring it to me at once? If you have it with you I will refund you what it cost you—of course it belongs to me; I am surprised that you did not return my property sooner. But probably you have a sufficient excuse to offer."

"Yes, I have," said Sleuth.

"I suppose you are prepared to return it now, and by doing so convince me of my son's guilt—when of course you will have earned your pay."

"It is not necessary to produce the chain to establish your son's guilt. I have something here which will answer the same purpose;" as Sleuth spoke he took a wallet from his inner pocket, and opening it extracted therefrom a small piece of paper, which he handed to the banker, saying:

"If you are acquainted with your own son's handwriting, there is the proof."

The banker glanced at the paper and said:

"This is satisfactory as far as it goes," and he smiled grimly as he added: "that does not answer for the return of my property, unless you think that the second thief is the best owner."

"I don't think that theft ever establishes a claim to stolen property. Stolen property can always be claimed by the rightful owner, whether found upon the first or second thief. I don't know whether your son was the second, third, or fourth thief, but I do know that that chain was originally stolen—the rightful owner now claims it. Of course you can account for having it in your possession, and you certainly would not wish to hold another's property if he should prove his claim, under any circumstances."

The banker's face was perfectly ghastly during these remarks of Sleuth; but having been prepared for something like this his tones were wonderfully even as he said:

"Your language astonishes me, and you must certainly be aware that I will not surrender my claim to my own property on some trumped-up claim of previous ownership. That chain has been in my possession for sixteen years—"

"Exactly," said Sleuth, and the look he gave the banker was perfectly terrible, as he added: "It was just sixteen years ago that the first owner was murdered and the chain stolen from his dead body. What I seek now is restitution—I charge no man; but Charles Henry Decker, about sixteen years ago, suddenly disappeared; he had a large sum of money about him in the shape of cash and checks, a diamond pin and this chain. I charge no man with being his murderer, but I do say that the only chance for the guilty to escape punishment is for him or them to make restitution of the stolen property to his orphan daughter; then my efforts cease—otherwise, I am on the track of the guilty, and,

by eternal justice, I swear that I will gather the evidence, link by link, until I forge a chain strong enough to suspend their bodies on the gallows!"

"How dare you come into my office and use such language to me?"

"I am ready to depart any moment that you request me to; I have only said what circumstances warrant me in saying."

"Were it not that I believe you honest, and governed by proper motives, I should send for an officer and have you arrested at once!"

"I was fully prepared to assume the responsibility of anything I should say when I said it. I know that there are strange developments yet to be made; every moment convinces me that I am on the right track for solving a great mystery. I will go now; when I see you again I will have more minute particulars of a tragedy which occurred sixteen years ago, just about the time this chain came into your possession."

The detective moved as if about to pass out when the banker stopped him by saying:

"One moment; I would rather have you as a friend than an enemy. I will give you five thousand dollars for that chain."

"Why don't you offer the one that your tools stole from Miss Lamont the other night at the ball to boot?"

"I have nothing further to say; to save scandal, for my family's sake, I offered you a high price—you declined it; you have seen fit to enter into a conspiracy against me for the purpose of extorting money. I see you have set your price too high, I now defy you—do your worst, and if this game ain't turned on you I'm no player, with the advantage of right on my side against fraud."

"I will go now," said Sleuth, "and when I come again I shall have a little toy familiarly called bracelets; and they're made of steel. Good-day," and he passed out.

A moment later Mr. Merritt was conversing with his clerks in a serene and business-like manner; but, underneath his assumed quiet, strange, stormy, wicked thoughts agitated his breast, and the subject of them boded no good to the great detective.

## CHAPTER XVII.

A WEEK succeeded Sleuth's exciting interview with the old banker without anything of special note occurring.

Late one evening an old gentleman, dressed in rather seedy attire, entered a notorious gambling-crib situated on a cross street a few doors from Broadway. The old gentleman assumed a kind of easy-come-go manner as he walked up to the table and laid down the price of a pile of checks. As he seated himself at the table three villainous-looking customers entered the room, and after helping themselves at the sideboard two of them seated themselves carelessly near the old gentleman, while the third engaged in conversation with a short-haired, square-featured, bull-necked, broad-shouldered, flashily dressed man who, by the air of authority which he assumed, announced himself as the proprietor of the game.

"Do you know who that old fog is?" said the fellow that was conversing with the proprietor.

"No."

"Well, I'll tell you what he is, he's a 'lead out' for a 'pull'!"

An ugly look darkened the proprietor's face upon hearing this. "Are you sure you've got him down fine?"

"As fine as silk!"

"If I was sure there was no mistake the old 'fake' will go fish-feeding before morning!"

"Give us a side lift, and he'll go anyhow. I've got it in for him!"

"Go ahead and work your paddles, I won't pull out your oar-locks!"

In the meantime the subject of this conversation continued steadily playing; occasionally he would cast his eye about the room and take in what was going on. He seemed to feel instinctively, as is commonly the case when we are being talked about, that he was the subject of conversation between the burly proprietor and the dangerous-looking customer who was whispering with him. The latter now came and took a seat on the opposite side of the table so as to face the old gentleman, and also the two fellows who had come in with him.

They commenced talking across the table, making the old gentleman's play the subject of their remarks; from mere criticism of his play



they proceeded to remarks upon his personal appearance, and finally began discussing his character and business, evidently intending to provoke him to some kind of retort to enable them to make a pretext for a personal assault. The old gentleman evidently saw the drift of their little game, and paid no attention to them. At length one of the three men bought an installment of checks and entered the game. The old gentleman had placed quite a pile of checks upon a certain card which won. The dealer immediately leveled the pile of checks with the winnings, when the fellow who had last come into the game reached over and "raked" down the whole pile. For the first time the old man spoke:

"Look here, my friend," said he; "that was my bet—those checks are mine."

"You are mistaken! that was my first play!"

The old man appealed to the dealer, who replied with a bland smile:

"Settle it among yourselves, gentlemen. Settle it among yourselves."

"But you know," said the old gentleman, "that it was I who laid that bet."

"I can't say, sir, that I do. I wasn't paying particular attention, although it strikes me that the gentleman who came in last covered that card."

"I can stand to be insulted," said the old gentleman, rising, "but not to be robbed."

"Who is robbing you?" cried the fellow who had appropriated the checks.

"You are trying to, but I don't mean to let you."

"You gray-headed, lying old rascal, what do you mean?"

"This is what I mean!" said the old gentleman, quickly, but in a very determined manner, as he thrust a formidable pistol within a few inches of the fellow's head. "I mean that I want you to lay those checks on the table!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"Look here, old man, lay down that barker, or we'll 'bore' you," shouted two or three of those sitting around the table, including the dealer.

"I'll lower the barker when the checks that belong to me are replaced upon the table," replied the old man; and there was not a quaver in his voice as he spoke.

At that instant, the old man, glancing suddenly across the room, beheld, reflected in one of the mirrors, the form of a man evidently directly behind him, who held a glittering knife in his hand, poised ready to plunge it into his neck. With the bound of a panther, Sleuth (for it was he) leaped to one side in time to avoid the descending blow, and bracing his back against the wall, shouted:

"Hark ye! yonder villain has lied; my business here had nothing to do with the game, but to lay on for that scoundrel who has 'put up!' this job. I claim the protection of this house. A 'pull' wasn't my *lay*, but in two seconds, if necessary, I can call on a reserve from where I stand: if I do so, it is because I am forced."

These words had a visible effect upon the proprietor, who stepped across the room, and, placing himself near Sleuth, and while a dangerous expression rested upon his strongly marked features, he said:

"There's been enough of this; just put up your shooters now. I'm just able to take in all disputes in this house myself," and turning toward the fellow who had volunteered the information concerning Sleuth's intentions, he raised his fist, and shaking it meaningly, he continued:

"I think you're a fraud, and if you ever come into my place again, to put up a job on any of my customers, I'll kick you out."

This turn of affairs convinced the three rascals, who were evidently hired assassins, that their game was up; and as is usual with such customers, with indistinct mutters of dire vengeance they sneaked toward the door, when a hint from the dealer caused the proprietor of the place to exclaim:

"Look here, my laddie-bucks, those checks one of you fellows just cashed in weren't yours: I just want you to plank that *duplex*, now quick."

Upon hearing this address, one of the three advanced toward the table, threw down a roll of bills which only a few minutes before he had received from the dealer, and rejoined his companions, when the ruffianly trio noiselessly slunk away. As they disappeared, Sleuth mut-

tered, "That's Emsley Merritt's first play out—good! I've seen his hand, and when I 'lead back' I'll take every trick."

Upon the following day Sleuth made a tour among the many well-known resorts of the numerous desperate characters who now and then figure prominently in the police reports. He was picking out the cards from which to select a "hand" to play against Emsley Merritt; we will see anon how well he succeeded.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Miss Lamont, I would be pleased to have you accompany me upon a little pleasure excursion I propose to make to-day."

These words were addressed to Minnie by a beautiful woman, who had recently become an inmate of the house where Minnie boarded. This lady, who was about thirty, represented herself as a wealthy French widow, and her personal appearance comported with this claim as far as her nativity was concerned. From the first moment of her introduction to Minnie, she had given evidence of feeling great admiration for the latter, and had consequently made herself particularly agreeable. So pleasant and cordial were her manners, and so apparently disinterested her friendship, that she had succeeded in making a deep impression on Minnie, who thus far had seen nothing but that which elicited unreserved confidence.

Upon several occasions our heroine had spoken of her new acquaintance to Harry Loveland, but it had so happened that, up to this time, he had never had the good fortune to meet her. Upon each occasion when he called, she was either out, or otherwise so engaged as to prevent an introduction.

The day previous to the one when Mrs. Obitz had proposed the excursion to Minnie, Harry had called with the express intention of arranging for an interview, as from numerous little indications he began to suspect that she especially avoided him.

It had been his intention, during this call, to drop a hint to Minnie of what was passing in his mind, and instruct her to act so that an introduction would either be brought about, or the widow driven to the giving of an unequivocal intimation of a desire to avoid meeting him.

Harry was determined to discover whether this lack of opportunity came from a series of accidents, or was the result of studied design. Unfortunately, a few moments after his entrance a number of professionals made a friendly call upon Minnie, and had remained until imperative business compelled Harry to offer his excuses and depart. Owing to this trifling obstacle at the time Mrs. Obitz made her proposal, Minnie had received no intimation of any cause for suspicion, and it required but little urging, on the part of the fascinating widow to win an acceptance of her invitation. An hour later, two ladies alighted from a private coupé, and went on board the Staten Island ferry-boat.

Upon their arrival at the lower landing, the two ladies disembarked, when Mrs. Obitz requested Minnie to remain at the ferry while she went to secure a conveyance. Twelve o'clock came and passed, and no Mrs. Obitz returned. Minnie now began to feel a little uneasy, and her uneasiness increased when another half hour passed, and still her friend did not come. At length, unable to endure the suspense, and prompted by a feeling of restlessness, she determined to take a stroll along the beach, and thus beguile the time. The continued absence of Mrs. Obitz struck her as remarkably strange, and for the first time a suspicion crossed her mind, concerning the integrity of this new-found friend. This continued absence upon such an occasion, to say the least, was very strange, and resulted in Minnie's coming to the determination not to proceed further with her, but to make this unexpected delay the excuse for returning to New York.

Thus ruminating, she continued to stroll along without thinking how far she was proceeding; but at length she bethought herself as to the distance she was traversing. Looking at her watch she saw that it was half past one o'clock; she had started at half past twelve, and consequently had been walking an hour. Upon looking back, with a little chill of alarm, she discovered that she was far out of sight of the landing-place, but feeling fatigued and having given up all intention of proceeding further with Mrs. Obitz, she felt less concerned. Selecting a pleasant shady seat half-way up the bank, she sat down, and after partaking of a slight refreshment, amused herself by watching the various craft as they blithely danced over the rippling waters.

Finally, glancing city ward, she observed, away in the distance, the approaching ferry-boat, and arose, intending to retrace her steps, so as to reach the ferry in time to take this boat on its return trip; but at this moment, her eyes rested upon a lonely little grave-yard in which glistened in the rays of the afternoon sun a few solitary white head-stones. Curiosity impelled her to proceed toward this isolated home of the dead, and for some time she was interested in reading the several inscriptions upon the rude, whitewashed slabs. Having spent about as much time as she thought she could spare, she was about turning to leave, when her eye was attracted by a head-board more prominent than the others. Advancing toward it, she commenced reading the inscription, when suddenly she gave utterance to a startled scream, and then, exclaiming: "Oh, my God! what is this?" she fell headlong upon the grassy mound. Occasionally she gave utterance to exclamations of wonder and incredulity. "Oh, my father, my father!" she murmured: "what strange, tragic fate could have befallen thee! Through what weird circumstances comes it, that here, after many years, I find thy grave with thy name inscribed in full upon this rude slab; and yet all the inquiries set afloat to discover thy whereabouts, or thy fate, either living or dead, brought no tidings of thee?"

Rising to a sitting position, and leaning her back against the head-board, she continued, in a soliloquizing tone: "Some unseen, mysterious power seems to be leading toward the unraveling of this strange series of mysteries."

Minnie was so wrapt in the intensity of her thoughts, that she had become totally oblivious to the flight of time, nor did she observe that the mellow rays of the declining sun were now falling aslant the gabled roofs upon the opposite shore. All her senses were concentrated upon the one fact of this strange and mysterious discovery of the grave of her father upon this lone shore, with this stereotyped record: "Floated ashore." Half hidden by grass was some additional lettering, stating that, from papers found upon the body, it was supposed to be the remains of the person whose name was inscribed thereon.

The sun had now sunk beneath the horizon, and the lingering twilight was being succeeded by the silver rays of the full moon, which was just rising above the opposite hills, and still Minnie lingered at the grave of her parent. She had just risen to go, and had cast a parting glance upon the dear name as it shone out in the full rays of the moon, when she was startled by the sound of an approaching step. Turning with a surprised start, her eye rested upon the most singular and grotesque-looking man she had ever beheld, and the circumstances of the lonely situation gave the figure an increased weirdness. Upon beholding this strange object, Minnie was almost overcome with terror. She essayed to scream, but was so frightened that she had lost all control of her voice. For a moment, the two, thus singularly brought together, stood and gazed at each other without either of them uttering a word. The man was the first to break this painful silence; stepping from before Minnie, so that the rays of the moon might strike full upon her features, he said:

"This is a late hour and a lonely place for a young lady."

In answer to his remark, Minnie said: "Unexpected circumstances are the cause of my being here."

At this moment the stranger advanced closer, and for a few seconds peered intently in Minnie's face. Upon witnessing this strange action, she experienced a slight return of her former alarm, but again she was reassured when he spoke and said:

"You must not be afraid of me, miss, I am well known; everybody knows me hereabouts. I would not harm any one, but the sight of your face arouses strange memories; I have seen you before."

"Where do you think you have seen me?" inquired Minnie, with surprise.

"That I can't tell you, miss. I ain't what I used to be, my mind has been shattered; for twelve years I knew nothing; it was gone from me entirely, but for the last few years I have been recovering my faculties, and each day different objects recall fresh recollections. Previous to the accident which befell me, I have either known you or yours. There is something in your features which strikes me as familiar."

"It is strange," said Minnie, "that you should have such an impression, as according to your own statement of the time previous to the



accident to which you allude, I was but a child, and resided in California."

"Possibly so—possibly so; but I may have known your father or—"

"What, did you know my father?" interrupted Minnie, suddenly pointing toward the name upon the grave-slab.

"Is that your father buried there?"

"It is," replied Minnie; "did you know him?"

"It's strange—strange!" muttered the man.

"Did you know the party who is buried here? or do you know any of the circumstances connected with the finding of the body, for see—" added Minnie, "like the others, it floated ashore?"

"How do you know that was your father?"

"That was my father's name—my father was lost years ago—the date of his disappearance accords with the date when this body was found."

"Do you know that since I first saw this grave it has been an object of strange interest to me? I have sat here by the hour studying that name. It seems to be the dividing line between the two periods of my life. I know that the person buried there had some connection with my former career."

"How do you know it?" inquired Minnie.

"I will tell you," replied the stranger. "See this," he added, as he extended his open hand toward Minnie. In his palm lay a ring, upon which was set a sparkling gem, whose brilliance rivaled the moonlight. "In the inner side of that ring," he continued, "is engraved a name which corresponds with that upon the tomb-slab."

"My God!" exclaimed Minnie, trembling like an aspen leaf, as she reached forth and took the ring. After a hurried examination, she added, with increased nervous excitement, "I recognize this ring; it was once the property of my father. For Heaven's sake, tell me quickly how did it come into your possession?"

"That is what I can not tell; there my memory fails; but I will tell you the strange accident which befell me, and you may suggest something which will assist in revivifying my lost faculty: Previous to about fifteen or sixteen years ago I was a rather wild and reckless character; this I learned from others. They don't seem to recollect that I had any known relatives, although I had lived, for the ten years previous to the time when the great accident befell me, across the bay, earning a subsistence by alternate fishing and farming. From them I learned that I had not been seen for a few days, when one morning I was brought to the lower landing on the Staten Island shore, by a party of young yachtsmen, who stated that they were sailing close under the shore in the dim light of early morning, when they saw a sudden flash, succeeded by the report of a pistol. At this moment, they were rounding a point which jutted out from the shore; straining their eyes in the direction whence the flash was seen, they beheld, a few hundred yards distant, a small boat. Owing to the state of the wind, it would have been necessary for them to have made a wide tack to reach the spot with the yacht, and instead, they came-to, and lowered a small boat, and dispatched it to investigate the affair. As they neared the spot, they beheld a boat, in which was a single oarsman, pulling away. At the same time, they saw the arms and head of a person evidently struggling in the water. Guided by a sense of humanity, they pulled toward the latter with the intention of rescuing him before following the man in the boat. They arrived just in time to rescue the drowning man; when, upon drawing him into their boat with exclamations of horror, they discovered that he was grievously wounded, and had a rope about his neck which, they at once surmised, had been attached to some weighty object intended to hold the body to the bottom; but evidently the rope had slipped, and the wounded man had come to the surface. During the time occupied in effecting this timely rescue, the author of the tragedy, whom they conceived to be the man they had seen pulling away, had disappeared from sight, and in the horror and surprise of the moment, instead of pulling in search of him, they returned to the yacht, and bore down to the landing for the purpose of procuring medical aid for the victim. Nothing was ever found leading to a discovery of the intended murderer. Upon my recovery, after a protracted struggle between life and death, my mind was gone, consequently I could give no information myself of the events which led to the tragedy. As I had previously told you, for twelve years succeeding this fearful horror, my memory was a

total blank. Some three or four years ago I began to give evidences of returning sanity; when I had recovered my reason sufficiently, I learned these facts which I have just related. It appears that at the time I was found I had that ring in my possession; as no other claimant was ever found, it was preserved and returned to me. Two years subsequent to the partial return of my reason, I was one day wandering listlessly along this beach, when I was attracted by this retired grave-yard. Curiosity led me into it, and then, for the first time, I discovered this grave, beside which we are standing, and recognized the similarity between the name engraved upon my ring, and that inscribed upon this slab. I at once inquired the fate of the person here buried, and learned that nearly a month after my rescue his body floated ashore. Rumors, unfavorable to me, have always been connected with the finding of such a valuable ring upon the person of one known to be as thrifless as myself; but owing to the condition of my mind, no decided steps were ever taken to unfathom the mystery, and now the facts have evidently faded from the minds of the people hereabouts."

Minnie listened to this tragic narrative with breathless interest; and upon its conclusion, with a thrill of horror the impression fastened itself upon her mind that for some purpose, through some weird and mysterious guidance, upon this clear moonlight night over the grave of her murdered father, she was conversing with one of his murderers.

## CHAPTER XIX.

"You have never succeeded then, in learning any further particulars of the death of my father," inquired Minnie, "beyond the fact that his body floated ashore?"

"I have not been able to obtain any further facts," replied the man. "I have made thorough inquiries in every direction; the villagers know nothing beyond the facts which I have related."

"Have you ever had the courage to inquire whether your life, previous to the morning of the tragedy, was such as to warrant the suspicion that you yourself would have been likely to have been engaged in any murderous enterprise?"

"I must confess that I have not had the courage to ask that question. There is something so strange as regards the ring that I have not dared to."

"Are you well assured of your present inclinations?" inquired Minnie.

"I am; for the last three years I have been governed by higher motives than mere personal impulse."

"I will tell you frankly," said Minnie, solemnly, "that I have laid the basis of a theory which reflects severely upon your previous integrity; but your present state of mind, your frankness and fairness, have extinguished any bitterness that I might otherwise feel against one toward whom suspicion pointed as one of the destroyers of my father. As his daughter, and the only living injured party, I assure you that I freely forgive you for any part you may have acted in this dreadful work, upon condition that you fairly render all the assistance in your power toward the solution of this horrible mystery."

As Minnie ceased speaking, she extended her hand as a pledge of the sincerity of her words. The stranger seized it, and removing his slouched hat, extended his arm, and lifting his eyes toward the heavens, he said: "I solemnly swear that no price will be too high for me to pay for the privilege of making restitution. I will render you assistance in this matter, even to the sacrifice of my life; upon this statement you may rely, for 'I swear' it."

"I believe and will trust you," said Minnie, "and I think I have a friend who can not only assist you in recalling events, but can put every little item of fact together, and eventually furnish, in detail, each incident as it actually occurred in this fearful drama. You must come to me to-morrow in New York; you must have an interview at once with Sleuth, the great detective."

At the mention of the name Sleuth, coupled with the appellation detective, the stranger gave a frightened start. Minnie noticed this, and added quickly, "Sleuth is my friend, interested in this matter, not as an officer of the law, but in my private interest. I will assure you frankly that it is not my intention or desire that any punishment greater than that which you

have already suffered shall be visited upon you; all I wish is to unfathom the mystery. I ask neither restitution nor vengeance, except if you believe this ring is mine, let me have it. To indemnify you against any mistake, I will pay you its full value in money."

"The ring is yours! you shall pay me nothing; already do I feel new light breaking in upon my mind. I feel that there is but one link wanting to establish a complete chain of memory. If I could accidentally hear the name, or even place my eyes upon the face of that man who pulled away alone in the boat, in the dim light of that early dawn, upon that fatal morning, I would recall all. There is an indistinct, shadowy, ghastly countenance constantly floating before my mental vision. I am looking for that face in the flesh. I know I shall find it!"

"God grant that you may!" exclaimed Minnie, "I, too, believe that you will. If anything should happen," Minnie added, prompted by a sudden thought, "that I should not see you myself again, do not fail to seek Sleuth; he is kind and good, and my friend. I will give you my address, and you must give me yours."

Just as Minnie opened her satchel to find a card and pencil, they were both startled by the sound of voices, and the grinding of approaching steps in the bed of gravel which lined the shore. The coming party, whoever they were, were not yet in sight. They were hidden by an immense boulder from view.

The approaching footsteps caused Minnie to delay for a moment her search for the pencil. A moment later, two men and a woman passed from behind the boulder, and Minnie at once recognized the lady by her dress as Mrs. Obitz. At the same moment that Minnie caught sight of them, they also beheld her and her companion, and Mrs. Obitz exclaimed:

"Good Heaven! there she is, and some one with her;" and as she spoke, she started and ran swiftly along the beach, and upon arriving at the grave where Minnie was standing, she accosted the latter with the words:

"Good gracious! my dear, what a fright you have given me; what on earth has kept you away so long, and what infatuation brought you to such a lonely, out-of-the-way, hobgoblin place as this? Phew!" she added, in a shrill voice, at the same time shrugging her shoulders vigorously; "what a horrible place, a grave-yard—I hate grave-yards!" and thus she continued rattling along for some moments, without giving Minnie any chance to reply. In the meantime the two men had approached to a point on the beach opposite to where the ladies stood. At length Mrs. Obitz was compelled to stop from pure exhaustion, when Minnie said, coldly:

"There is much to be explained, Mrs. Obitz. I believe you have heard a part of my history. Accident brought me to this place, but in this lonely grave-yard I have found the grave of my father. How I came here I will tell you at some future time. This latter startling fact explains why I have lingered so long."

"Mon Dieu!" cried Mrs. Obitz; "my dear child, I fear you have lost your senses. How ridiculous to think that your papa should be buried in such an outlandish place as this."

"I am ready to depart," said Minnie, "although I shall ever feel that your prolonged absence, after leaving me at the ferry-house, was a very fortunate circumstance. I must say, that for a time I felt somewhat indignant."

"I feared that you would, my dear," replied Mrs. Obitz, quickly; "but you shall hear what a strange accident befell me. Yes, I have a funny story to tell you."

During the whole time, since Mrs. Obitz's arrival, Minnie had noticed that her strange companion, the old man, had gazed at the French lady with a strange, startled expression of countenance. While the latter was speaking, he was constantly making some kind of significant signals, as if desirous of attracting our heroine's attention, and intimating that he had something to communicate privately. When Mrs. Obitz finally concluded with the remark, "But come, my dear, let us get away from this outlandish place," and started down the bank, the old man came close up to Minnie, while she knelt for a moment upon the grave, and whispered, in a low, hurried voice:

"Do you know the character of the woman who seems to be your friend?"

"I do not," replied Minnie, turning upon him a look of surprised inquiry.

"She is a murderess."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Minnie, audibly; "what grounds have you for saying so?"



"That woman has been tried for her life. She was accused of murdering her husband. She escaped by some one of the many intricate points in the law, still there is not a person acquainted with the circumstances who does not believe her guilty; besides, she is intimately acquainted with a notorious gambler and bond-robber."

"Oh, my God!" murmured Minnie, "what shall I do?" as she observed Mrs. Obitz returning and beckoning for her to come. "I am coming in a moment," called Minnie, in answer to the summons to "hurry out of that horrid place;" then, turning to the old man, she inquired in a low voice: "What would you advise me to do? I certainly can not leave her thus abruptly."

"Where does she propose to take you?" asked the old man.

"Why, we intended to return to New York of course, but I suppose it is too late now, and we will have to stop in the village overnight."

"If you reach the village in safety you are all right. I fear that is not the intention; that woman will not return to the village. Her friend owns a house not a quarter of a mile from here, although it's a mile walk around the bluff to get there. If harm is intended you, the intention is to inveigle you into that house. If you once get there, God help you."

Again Mrs. Obitz calling impatiently, Minnie moved slowly toward her. As she did so, she said to the old man: "What is your name?"

"Skinner, Hank Skinner."

"Well, Mr. Skinner, you must accompany me. I will claim you as a former friend, and refuse to go anywhere but to the village."

"That will do," said he, and they speedily joined Mrs. Obitz, who, seeing Mr. Skinner accompanying her, said, in a sharp, insolent manner:

"What man is this? why does he come with you?"

"This gentleman is a former friend," replied Minnie; "our meeting was unexpected but fortunate. We have important business together. He will accompany us to the village, and go with me in the morning to New York."

"But, my dear, you are not going to the village to-night; where on earth would you stay after you got there?"

At this moment Mr. Skinner spoke up and said: "It is handier for this young lady to go to the village. The accommodations there are excellent. I would suggest that she insist upon going to the village."

"You are a stranger to me, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Obitz, facing Mr. Skinner; at the same time, tossing her head disdainfully, she added, "Miss Lamont is under my charge. I am responsible for her safety. You have no business to make any suggestions. Miss Lamont will accompany me, and I must request that you proceed about your business for the present."

"My business for the present, Lizzie —, is to see Miss Lamont safely to the village, and from thence to New York. It is as well to be frank; I have disclosed your real character to this young lady; your game, whatever it is, is up."

At the first utterance of the name by which Skinner addressed Mrs. Obitz, her face underwent a complete change. Her comely features became swollen with rage, and her black eyes glittered with the baleful light of an excited cobra, as she exclaimed:

"We will see!" and at the same moment she called to the two men who, during all this time, had been amusing themselves by skipping pebbles over the moonlighted waters. Upon hearing Mrs. Obitz call, they both hurried up toward the party. As the men approached, she exclaimed, pointing toward Mr. Skinner:

"Gentlemen, that lying rascal there has been filling my friend's ear with horrible stories concerning me."

"Why, that old fellow," replied one of the men, "is crazy Hank Skinner, he's a lunatic. I hope the young lady," he added, bowing toward Minnie, "has not been frightened by any of the crazy exaggerations of this bedlamite. Why, miss," he continued, "that old man hasn't spoken a sane word for fifteen years: any of the villagers will bear me out in this."

"Why, my dear child—my dear child! are you still determined to place yourself under the protection of this crazy town lounge, in preference to accompanying me? You should have known me yourself well enough not to have believed any atrocious lies concerning me from such a source; and even if this man has recovered his reason, the best proof that he is mis-

taken in the person is the fact that, a moment ago, he addressed me by a name which, I assure you upon my honor as a lady, I never heard before. But allow me to introduce you to my friends, who kindly volunteered to act as my escort when I came out in search of you. Mr. Henry Lawrence, Miss Lamont; Mr. Wiseman, Miss Lamont."

Minnie acknowledged the salutations of both gentlemen, when the one introduced as Mr. Lawrence said:

"This would be a rich joke, Miss Lamont, if not attended with a prospective serious result. I assure you that this man's word is utterly worthless, and does not merit a moment's credence. I am surprised that you could have been deceived by his miserable misrepresentations." Then, turning to Mrs. Obitz, he continued, "under the circumstances, it is probably wiser to gratify Miss Lamont's desire to remain for the night at the village. Upon our arrival there, we can quickly prove what value is to be attached to this worthless scoundrel's word."

Mrs. Obitz laughed merrily as she said, "The idea of such a thing; if it was not so embarrassing, it would be too ridiculous for anything. But come, Minnie, we will go to the village, and I will prove my character. Ha, ha, ha! My dear, I already sympathize with you for the vexation you will experience for having listened to that old lunatic's stories." As she concluded she stepped forward, and slipping her arm in Minnie's, resumed: "Come, poor little frightened bird, we will go to the village; you certainly won't be afraid to let such an old ogre as I am walk by your side, especially since you will be followed by such a glorious champion as you have succeeded in picking up."

Mrs. Obitz's tones were so sweet and pleasant, and her manner so frank, that Minnie, even if fully assured of her dishonesty, could not, especially under the circumstances, have offered any objection, and she allowed herself to be led away. As they proceeded along, Mrs. Obitz remarked:

"It's really getting very late; if you feel able, my love, we will hurry up," and she drew Minnie along quite rapidly; in fact, so fast did she cause her to walk, that they were soon some distance in advance of the three men who were leisurely bringing up the rear. At the rate they were proceeding, the two ladies soon passed beyond the boulder previously mentioned, and out of sight of the three men. A sudden fear took possession of Minnie that there was some design in thus hurrying her ahead, and she had just determined to stop and await the approach of Mr. Skinner, when she was startled by a sudden fierce exclamation, succeeded by several loud oaths and the sound of shuffling feet, and other indications of a desperate struggle. Slipping her arm from Mrs. Obitz's, she turned to fly back, exclaiming:

"Good heavens! what are they doing?" but Mrs. Obitz caught her by the dress for the purpose of restraining her, at the same time exclaiming: "Oh, it is nothing; probably that lunatic has been taken with one of his freaks; come, we must hurry on." But at that moment the sharp report of a pistol rang out upon the clear night air, and was followed by the heavy thud of a succession of blows.

"Let me go! let me go!" cried Minnie, struggling to free herself; but Mrs. Obitz clung to her, constantly exclaiming; "You must not go back! you must not go back! That madman will kill you."

"I will!" shouted Minnie, and at the same time she sprang forward so suddenly as to free herself from the grasp of her companion. Rushing wildly past the boulder, she encountered the two men coming toward her. At a glance, she noticed that the face of one was covered with blood, while a few yards distant lay the form of Mr. Skinner in a heap upon the beach.

"This is no place for you, Miss Lamont," said one of the men, hoarsely, as he seized her by the wrist, "that madman was seized with a fit of madness and attacked us both; we were compelled to fell him to the earth. See, he has already wounded my friend."

"I must go to him! I must go to him! Oh, let me go! let me go!" cried Minnie, struggling to free herself the second time; but at this instant, Mrs. Obitz came up, her face perfectly ablaze with fury.

"This nonsense must cease," she said in a hoarse whisper; "that pistol shot will draw witnesses; choke the vixen, if she screams." Then advancing close to Minnie, who was now perfectly subdued by surprise and terror, she

said: "Miss Lamont, we can't afford to foot any longer; accompany me quietly and you will not be harmed; make the least outcry and I'll have you choked to insensibility. For the present, it's to my interest to keep you for awhile out of the City of New York; that old scoundrel there told you the truth; for the present you are a prisoner, my name is Lizzie —." The last words sounded upon unconscious ears; Minnie had fainted; at the instant steps were heard running along the beach.

"Take her in your arms," cried Mrs. Obitz, "we must not be caught here."

Taking the unconscious girl in his arms, the man glided up through the bushes which lined the bank, followed by the other two, and succeeded in passing beyond sight, as two fishermen hurried around the boulder, and with cries of consternation and surprise came up to the prostrate form of Mr. Skinner.

## CHAPTER XX.

"THUNDER and lightning! this young lady is an awful load if she is handsome!" exclaimed the man who bore Minnie in his arms, as he arrived, panting and blowing, at the top of the hill.

With the assistance of both men, the party were enabled to bear Minnie along rapidly through the bushes until they arrived at a little stream of water which trickled over an adjoining ledge. Here they stopped. Mrs. Obitz made a pillow of her shawl, and she and one of the men began bathing Minnie's temples with the cool water. Minnie quickly exhibited signs of returning consciousness, and, after a few seconds' application of the water, opened her eyes. The first object they encountered was the pale, determined features of the French fiend who had been instrumental in entrapping her to Staten Island.

"You have had a terrible fright, my dear," murmured Mrs. Obitz.

"Where am I, and where have you brought me to?" inquired Minnie.

"We were on the way to the village," replied Mrs. Obitz, "in compliance with your wishes, when that crazy fellow, Skinner, was seized with a sudden freak of madness, and, in his demoniac fury, shot one of the gentlemen in the face. I tell you, we have had an awful time. It is fortunate that the poor gentleman was not killed. You wanted to go back and put yourself right in the way of the frantic lunatic, who was preparing to attack you also, when Mr. Wiseman was compelled to fell the foaming madman to the ground; at that moment you fainted."

Minnie had now risen to a sitting position. Like a flash, a recollection of all that had occurred came to her mind, and above all, the confession at the critical moment, "I am Lizzie —." She recognized, also, that Mrs. Obitz was trying to put an entirely different complexion upon what had occurred, but it was now too late to attempt any further deception.

In answer to the false statement of Mrs. Obitz, Minnie said:

"Madame, it is unnecessary for you to attempt to deceive me further; you unmasked your intention when you confessed yourself as Lizzie —."

"I have no desire to deceive you, Miss Lamont; I confess that I entrapped you to Staten Island for a purpose. I am paid to amuse you for awhile, but what I have just told you about the occurrence with that lunatic is the absolute truth!"

"That has little to do with my future prospects. What object had you in making me a prisoner?"

"A big bank account, my love."

"You are an instrument of Emsley Merritt."

"Not exactly, my dear; but I believe he is the man on whom I make my checks. We have no intention of doing you any personal injury. You may never give me the credit of it, but I have been the means of saving your life. Your enemies were willing to pay a high price to have you put out of the way entirely. You are perfectly safe with me, if you offer no resistance!"

"That is," replied Minnie, as she rose to her feet, "if I will permit myself to be sacrificed to gratify your greed! I will take my bonnet, if you please," she added, extending her hand to take her hat, which Mrs. Obitz had removed, and was idly swinging in her hands.

Upon receiving it, she adjusted it as deliberately as though she was standing before her own toilet-glass; at the same time she was tak-



ing a rapid survey of the surroundings. She knew that to yield quietly was indefinite immolation, and possibly murder; and she had no idea of thus quietly surrendering without making one brave struggle.

Stepping quickly a short distance away, she turned, and, facing Mrs. Obitz, said:

"You are engaged in a high-handed crime; I will not accompany you another step; if I am to be your prisoner, you must take me by force."

"Tut, tut, Miss Lamont, you are talking now like a heroine, not like a New York girl; if you wish to avoid decided and rough measures you will put aside your tragic airs at once. A month or two's rustication in a country villa will benefit your health after the arduous labors of your profession."

Without making any reply, Minnie moved away. Suddenly Mrs. Obitz withdrew her hand from the folds of her dress. In it was a cocked pistol. She leveled it at Minnie, and said:

"Utter one scream, and you die; I am not to be trifled with; I have gone too far. Go with us quietly, and you shall be unharmed. When we reach the chateau, I will be ready to listen to any propositions you have to make. Possibly I am willing to back out from my participation in this matter, but not at this moment."

Minnie still continued moving away, when Mrs. Obitz cried: "Stop, or I shall fire!"

"If I can not escape from your grasp, that is the greatest boon you can confer upon me."

At that moment the sound of voices was heard. Seized by a sudden impulse, Minnie uttered a loud scream. At the same instant the report of a pistol sounded upon the air. Like an antelope she started and ran in the direction whence the voices had been heard.

"Seize her!" shouted Mrs. Obitz to the two men, "or all is lost!"

As Minnie flew along, she gave utterance to a succession of piercing screams. The two men were now in hot pursuit of her, followed by Mrs. Obitz. Minnie felt that everything depended upon her keeping beyond their grasp for a few seconds longer. She was assured that her screams had been heard, and that assistance was coming. But closer and closer and closer came her pursuers. In an instant it must be rescue or capture. As one of the men, who was close upon her, reached forward to seize her dress, he tripped. This accident, owing to the speed with which he was running, threw him forward as if shot from a catapult, and he came floundering full tilt against Minnie, and both fell upon the rocky path. Minnie's body interposing, broke the force of the man's fall, and he was less injured than she. For a moment the shock stunned her, and before she could recover her breath, the ruffian's hand was upon her throat. With an oath he muttered:

"You've brought this upon yourself," and he brutally tightened his fingers about her throat. By this time the others came up. Mrs. Obitz said hurriedly:

"Keep her mouth shut and hurry away with her; some one is close upon us; don't let her whimper. I'll go and meet them, and account for the screams."

Thus a second time Minnie was borne rapidly away, and owing to the rough usage she had received, unable to utter another scream.

## CHAPTER XXI.

UPON the afternoon of the same day that Minnie accompanied Mrs. Obitz to Staten Island, Harry Loveland called at her home and was informed where she had gone, and with whom. An icy chill agitated his heart upon receiving this information, and he blessed himself for not having disclosed his suspicions. There was still a possibility that there was no evil intent in the French woman's friendship; but Harry's thorough knowledge of the dark ways and desperate resources of a certain class of New York criminals, impressed him with an idea that the probabilities were strongly in favor of there being some design in this sudden and violent friendship of Mrs. Obitz. He regretted that she had gone, but still hoped for the best. That night he made it a point to attend at the theater earlier than usual. Harry was known by all the *attachés* of the theater as a particular friend, if not a relative, of the favorite *prima donna*; and as he turned from the sidewalk into the broad entrance leading toward the auditorium, he encountered the manager, who saluted him with the inquiry, "Where is Miss Lamont this evening?"

"Good Heaven!" cried Harry, his face blanched by a sudden paleness; "isn't she here?"

"She is not, nor has she been here. This is the first time Miss Lamont ever failed me," replied the manager.

Harry was a strong man, but at this moment a child could have pushed him over, so fearful was the effect of this information upon him. He stood gazing at the manager when that functionary repeated the question.

"Don't you know what detains Miss Lamont to-night?"

"Would to Heaven that I didn't," replied Harry; "and I would feel less alarmed."

"Pshaw! Harry, you are taking a trifling circumstance very much to heart. There are a hundred little *contretemps* that could have occurred to have prevented her return."

"Possibly," said Harry, as he turned and passed out on to Broadway. From the theater he proceeded direct to Minnie's home. When the door opened in answer to his ring, he inquired eagerly, "Has Miss Lamont returned?"

"She has not," returned the servant; "and the mistress is very much alarmed about her."

"Tell your mistress I would like to see her in the parlor."

A moment later, as the lady of the house entered the parlor, she said:

"Have you been to the theater, Mr. Loveland?"

"I have," replied Harry.

"And Miss Lamont is not there?"

"She is not; nor has she been heard from by any one attached to the theater."

"How strange; do you really think that anything could have happened to her?" said Mrs. Grey, as she turned up the gas. "I was somewhat worried," she added; "but thought that, having been detained later than she expected, Miss Lamont had gone to the theater direct from the ferry. Do you think that anything serious has happened?"

"Who is this Mrs. Obitz?" inquired Harry.

"I know nothing about her, beyond what she herself represented. She came here to board, saying that she had been directed here by one of my former boarders."

"Have you noticed anything peculiar about her?"

"I have not," replied Mrs. Grey. "But would you like to see her photograph?"

"I would," said Harry.

"I have one, which she accidentally left upon the parlor mantel." Mrs. Grey selected from a number of photographs one, and handed it to Harry.

The moment he glanced at it he exclaimed, "Is that a photograph of Mrs. Obitz?"

"It is," replied Mrs. Grey, "and is a perfect likeness."

"This photograph," said Harry, "is the likeness of the notorious woman who figured some years ago as the murderess of her husband."

"Great heavens!" cried Mrs. Grey, "and she has been an inmate of my house."

For a moment Harry stood silent, evidently lost in thought; at length he said:

"It is not probable that you will see me, Mrs. Grey, for a week or so. This matter opens a field for the exercise of the skill of a friend of mine. I will tell you at once, I have given up all hope of seeing Miss Lamont until she is rescued from out of the grasp of her enemies. I tell you this, so that, as a friend of Miss Lamont, you will be ready to render any assistance in your power. You understand?"

"I think I do," replied Mrs. Grey; "and will render all the assistance in my power."

"We will, most probably, be compelled to summon you to our aid. I am going from here direct to the office of the great detective; any little point, or fact, which you may obtain, you will please communicate to Sleuth at once. Here is his address. I must caution you to let none other know what you communicate. There are interests involved, which eventually, when you come to know them, will astound you."

Reiterating his injunction of secrecy, Harry bade Mrs. Grey good-night, and proceeded direct to the office of Sleuth.

## CHAPTER XXII.

"THERE'S been murder here!" exclaimed one of the men, as they came to the place where the body of Skinner lay.

"Yes; and whoever did this ain't far off," remarked the other.

Skinner was lying on his face in the wet sand. One of the men took hold of him and rolled him

over upon his back; as he did so, and the full light of the moon shone upon his pallid features, both men exclaimed, "Why, it's crazy Skinner!"

The one who had moved him brushed the clotted gray hair back from his brow, disclosing an ugly gash, which must have been caused by a blunt instrument.

After some little trouble, they succeeded in getting the wounded man down to the point where they had left their boat, and had just fixed him comfortable in the bottom, when they were both startled by a succession of piercing shrieks, evidently uttered by a female.

"By jingo, there's more of it!" cried one of them, as he dropped the anchor upon the beach. "Let the old man lie," he added, "and follow me; we might as well see this thing through. I guess there's bloody work going on all around!"

When about half way to the point from whence they judged the screams had come, they met three young fellows, the same three that Mrs. Obitz had so successfully deceived concerning the cause of Minnie's screams.

"What is going on up here?" inquired one of the fishermen.

"It's hard to tell," answered one of the three men. "We just heard a succession of screams a few moments ago, which came from just above here; we thought somebody was getting killed, but upon getting up there we only found a handsome woman all alone by herself—the said that she had been frightened by her own shadow!"

"Well; we found something a little more serious than that down on the beach," said one of the fishermen; "we've just found an old man with his head split open, and it's just a lucky chance that his skull wasn't mashed entirely."

"What did I tell you?" cried one of the three men, who had previously expressed a doubt of the truth of Mrs. Obitz's story. Upon hearing the particulars from the fishermen of what they had heard and seen and found, all five men determined to go in pursuit of the woman. They were now convinced that some kind of devilish work had been going on; that the woman they had encountered was only a decoy and must have had confederates near by. A few moments brought them back to the place where they had encountered the woman, and they all commenced making a careful examination of the ground and shrubbery thereabouts. After a few seconds, one of them was heard to exclaim: "Thunder and Mars, here's a clew!"

The others quickly gathered about him, and he called their attention to a sharp stone in the pathway which was smeared with fresh blood. "That's evidence!" said the one who had discovered the blood, "that there's been something underhand going on here. I tell you, boys, we were bluffed too easy by that woman. I thought all along that it was something more than a shadow which frightened her if she was the one who uttered those screams; but, between you and me and the post, I don't believe that she was the one that was screaming at all."

"Well, there is only one thing to be done, now," said one of the others, "we've got to follow this thing up; if there has been any murder going on, the clews are fresher than they will be by and by."

"What are we going to do about the wounded man in the boat?" inquired one of the fishermen; "the tide is rising, and the poor fellow may be tipped out."

"One of you go back to the boat while the rest of us trace this thing up. In case there is any devilish work going on, we'll want all of the assistance we can get." As one of the fishermen turned to go back to the boat, he was directed to remain there until the return of the rest of the party. The four men now returned and made a more thorough examination of the ground. Step by step they advanced, until, when about a hundred yards distant, the whole party were summoned together again by an exclamation from one of their number. Upon gathering around him they were shown a small pocket pistol which he had found upon the ground, one of the barrels of which had evidently but recently been discharged. More thoroughly and cautiously the search was now renewed. Each momentarily expected to come suddenly upon the ghastly and mutilated remains of a victim.

But nothing further rewarded their investigations, only the finding of a lady's glove and a shred of dress, which had evidently been torn off by a branch of prickly brier. Upon returning to a point in the vicinity of the boat, the three men directed the fisherman to rejoin his



companion, and carry the wounded man to the village; at the same time one of them furnished their names and address, telling the fishermen to notify the nearest justice of the peace of all that had occurred, and giving him their address, stating that they were willing to come down from New York at any time for the purpose of giving their testimony, in case of any future developments.

Twenty minutes' rowing brought the fishermen, with their charge, down to the village landing. As they pulled in beside the dock, with the intention of running their boat on the beach, a sail-boat, containing a single individual, rounded the dock, heading from New York, and ran in close beside them. While standing on the beach undecided, owing to the lateness of the hour, what immediate steps to take, the strange boat ran up alongside of them, and a rather rough-looking man sprang from the boat, and tossed his anchor upon the beach.

"Halloo! my hearties!" he cried, as he approached the two fishermen, "what's up?" At the same time noticing the man lying in the bottom of their boat, he added, suddenly: "Halloo! what have you got there? a corpse?"

"Not exactly," answered one of the fishermen; "but where do you hail from, stranger?"

"I've just sailed over from the Ridge; I had a little business over this side; but come, what's the matter with the man in the boat?"

"He's been hurt."

"How did he get hurt?"

"Well, that's just what we haven't dropped on yet. We were up on the beach and heard a kind of scuffle; upon getting up there we saw nobody, but found this old man lying there with a hole in his head."

"Let me take a look at him; bring him out."

"Well, I suppose we might as well," replied the fisherman, "we can't leave him here all night in the boat. That man wants a doctor, sure."

During all this time the wounded man lay in a kind of stupor in the bottom of the boat. With the assistance of the stranger, the fisherman got him upon his feet on the beach, and the third man advanced, placed his hands upon Skinner's shoulders, and scanned his face with a sharp, critical look.

"Think you know him, stranger?" inquired the fisherman.

"I never saw him before."

"You seem to be mightily interested in his face."

"Well, I thought I might know him; but come, if you know where there's a doctor, the quicker we get the poor fellow up there, the better." As the stranger said this, he placed his hand on the wound and examined it with an intelligent significance, which hardly comported with his rough garb.

"I guess we'd better take him up to the tavern," said one of the men, "and then send for the doctor; the nearest M.D. around here lives just opposite the tavern; but then the rub is, who'll foot the bill? This chap ain't got no money, and we can't pay nothing for him."

"Well, we can't see a human creature die for want of care," said the stranger. "I've got a few odd dollars I'll lay out on him, until the county or some richer chap steps in. Do you know the man?"

"Oh, yes, we've known him for fifteen years; he got in a scrape like this fifteen years ago, and he's been kind of half-witted ever since."

Arrived at the tavern, it required considerable rapping and thumping to rouse the landlord. Finally he shoved his head out of the window over the portico, and shouted: "Who's there?"

"I and Gabe Jones, and another man," replied one of the fishermen; "we've got crazy Hank here. The poor fellow has been clubbed by somebody, and we want to get him a bed, and send for a doctor."

"Take him down to the jail," replied the landlord.

"You'll let a room and bed if you get good pay, won't you?"

"Yes; but who the d—l's going to pay me? not those chaps with you there; they ain't got no money to chuck away."

"I'll pay you your own price; get down quick and give us a chance to get this man to bed; I don't know but what he's past all hope now, for the want of proper care; it's a heathenish lot around here anyhow," muttered the stranger.

At that moment, as they heard the bolt slipping from behind the door, the man who had so generously offered to pay, directed one of the

fishermen to go after the doctor, and as the door opened, he led the injured man into the bar-room. As they entered, the landlord thrust his candle into the face of the stranger, and said:

"Look ahere, old man, I want you to plank up two or three dollars afore I put this old chap to bed; this county won't see me righted for taking care of town paupers; I want my money as I go."

"Here you are," said the stranger, thrusting a ten-dollar note under the landlord's nose; "no more growling now, get this poor fellow to bed."

The doctor arrived shortly after, and made a hasty examination. He stated that the wound was a bad one, but not necessarily fatal; and after dressing it hurriedly, he left a few directions and went off. The landlord and the three men adjourned to the bar, and at the solicitation of the stranger, the bar was opened and some whisky drunk. While preparing the drinks, the landlord, who had become quite sociable after the receipt of the ten-dollar bill, inquired of the stranger if old Hank was a friend of his.

"Never saw him before to-night," replied the man; "but I didn't want to see any poor fellow die for the want of a little care."

Turning to the two fishermen, the landlord inquired how did old Hank come to be injured. The fishermen felt some importance in being the possessors of a secret, and replied that they were not inclined to give any of the particulars until they told the whole story to the justice of the peace in the morning.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

UPON the following morning quite a crowd of villagers were assembled in the justice's office. The stranger who had taken such an interest in having the victim properly cared for went to one and another and listened attentively to what they had to say. His questions were few, but very pertinent; especially did he seem anxious to learn all the particulars about the body that floated ashore with a piece of the same rope attached to it as was found bound around Skinner.

During the progress of the examination a finely dressed, rather rakish-looking man entered the court-room. He had a pair of keen, glittering black eyes, with which he glanced around the room in a very marked manner. Suddenly his eyes fell upon the strange boat man who had given him the name as Zeb Crosby. The instant this stylish new-comer's glance rested upon this man a singular look of intelligence illuminated his features, and as he closed his fist nervously he unconsciously muttered, "By ginger, that's him as sure as I'm alive."

From that moment not a movement of Zeb Crosby, nor an expression of his face, escaped this last comer's keen watchfulness. In the meantime the two fishermen were relating the particulars of the previous night's adventure. They also surrendered into the hands of the justice the glove, pistol, and remnant of dress found in the vicinity of the place where the strange woman had been seen. As the piece of dress was handed up Zeb Crosby's face became pale, and his hand fairly trembled as he reached forth to receive the fragments from the hands of the justice's clerk, who passed it to him for examination at his request. He also examined the glove and pistol. In the inner lining of the glove he discovered the initial letters of a name, and it was evident to the man who was watching his every movement that he at once recognized the piece of dress and glove.

The examination was now brought to a close. The justice stated that a rigid examination would be made by the proper officers, and a thorough search instituted for the perpetrators of the assault upon Skinner, and the discovery of any further criminal acts which might have been perpetrated. Upon the conclusion of the justice's remarks the crowd dispersed. The man who represented himself as Zeb Crosby went direct to the tavern where Skinner was lying. Thither he was followed by the party who had kept him under such strict surveillance since the first moment his glance rested upon him. Zeb found Skinner in the same wandering state of mind as upon the night previous, and although he was better able to understand his incoherent mutterings after hearing the story of the fisherman, still he could not ascertain anything positive. His evident interest now began to excite attention and comment, so that, whatever his interest was in the matter, he felt it necessary to be less demonstrative. After giving directions for the proper care of the

wounded man he sauntered for some time about the village, stopping in at the different bar-rooms, and picking up what little additional scraps of information he could.

Early in the afternoon he walked down to the landing, and watching an opportunity, when least observed, he started up along the shore toward the point where the struggle had taken place.

Only one person had observed him proceed in the direction where the assault had taken place, and that was the same individual who had been dodging his steps the whole morning.

When Zeb started in that direction this man hurried up into the village to a livery stable, mounted a horse, which he had evidently left there, and galloped rapidly out of town.

In the meantime Zeb had arrived at the point where the body of Skinner was found, and now all the rusticity and greenness which had heretofore distinguished his manners vanished, and his whole manner changed, every movement denoting intelligence and shrewdness.

From the point where the scuffle had evidently taken place he traced the steps back to the grave-yard, and by the time he had reached there—by some method of reasoning peculiar to himself—he had succeeded in determining exactly how many persons had comprised the company.

While studying the several indications his eyes suddenly fell upon the inscription on the tombstone, which had previously attracted Minnie, and resulted in such violent emotion. Crosby, also, exhibited considerable surprise and wonder. He evidently recognized the name, and for full five minutes after having first beheld it, he stood without motion, lost in intense thought. At length he resumed his investigations; and evidently convinced that the party had gone no further in that direction he retraced his steps to the place where the struggle had taken place, and with the sagacity of an Indian traced each clew, until he found the exact spot where the party that bore Minnie away had gone up the bank to avoid the approaching fishermen.

Step by step he followed this trail, up to the spot where Minnie had been laid beside the brook and restored to consciousness.

Crosby spent nearly half an hour in a close scrutiny of this point, before he decided upon the right course to follow. At length he struck a path and slowly proceeded along. A half hour's walk brought him to an opening, where just beyond he beheld a curious old building. The condition of the yard and shrubbery thereabout convinced him that the old house had been deserted for a long time. As he proceeded toward the porch he discovered unmistakable signs of recent visitors.

Going to the door he seized the old-fashioned knocker, and gave several furious raps; but there was no response beyond the echo, as the sound reverberated through the vacant rooms. Again Crosby rapped, more furiously than before, but only received the same response. He now resumed his examination about the house. In the front porch where he was standing, his keen sight convinced him that parties had lately entered, but he could not find the least indication of their having departed by the same entrance; but going to the rear he soon found evidences of a hurried departure.

Dropping upon his hands and knees he drew a small pocket-rule, and measured, one by one, the different faint indications of foot-prints. At length he came to one which he measured over and over again, and examined thoroughly; seemingly satisfied, a glad expression illuminated his face as he rose to his feet and muttered:

"Thank God! there's been no murder committed yet. Just as I thought, at present, imprisonment only is what that old villain desires."

After a moment he added: "It won't be any harm to take a look inside of this old building. They've made a stop here, and I may be able to pick up a little information that may prove interesting." Going around to the side where the kitchen extended into a little separate inclosure Crosby soon succeeded in wrenching one of the decayed shutters open, and climbed through into the kitchen. There was nothing that he saw there indicating recent occupation; in fact, there were but few articles of furniture there at all. Passing on into the parlor, Crosby raised the window, threw open the shutters, and let the full light of the afternoon sun blaze into the room. Here he found unmistakable signs of very recent occupation. What few things there were in the room were thrown about in great disorder. Going upstairs, he was rewarded by finding a small article belonging to a lady's



wardrobe. He had obtained more evidence than he had anticipated, and was well satisfied with his first day's labors.

As he emerged through the kitchen window he observed an old negro crossing a field some distance below. A halloo brought him to a halt. In answer to Crosby's inquiries when the latter joined him, the negro said that many years ago the old building had been occupied by the Merritt family, but that Mr. Merritt had since become very rich, and was now living in grand style in the City of New York. Since the former proprietor moved to the city the house had been let to several different parties, but for the last two years it had been vacant, excepting occasionally when temporarily occupied by some parties from New York, whose movements seemed to be shrouded in a great deal of mystery.

"Have you seen any indications of its having been occupied recently?" inquired Crosby.

"Well, I supposed it was about to be, as a few new things were moved into it about a week ago, but since the day these things were brought up, I haven't seen anybody about the premises. But what makes you so curious about dat ole house?"

"Well, I'm looking about to buy a farm, and I've taken a kind of fancy to this place."

During Crosby's absence from the village the suspicion excited by his interest in the circumstances had increased, and some of the more influential people had consulted with the justice of the peace, and recommended that he should be arrested and compelled to furnish some account of himself.

The justice had noticed something peculiar in the man's actions, and upon Crosby's return to the village he was immediately arrested. On their way to the justice's office quite a crowd gathered and followed them, and, as usual, wonderful stories were soon in circulation.

It was rumored that the details of a horrible murder had been unearthed, and the murderer secured, and that he was the strange-acting fellow who had been lounging around town during the forenoon, in such a suspicious manner.

Upon being led before the justice that official inquired:

"What is your name?"

"Zeb Crosby."

"Are you a resident of Staten Island?"

"I am not," replied Crosby, who was the least excited and the coolest person in the court-room, not excepting the justice himself.

"Where do you reside?" inquired the official.

"I came from Long Island," was the reply.

"What business brought you to this island?"

"I don't know," replied Crosby, "as that concerns anybody but myself. I should like to ask you honor the reason of this excitement, and why I am arrested and subjected to this examination?"

"You are aware," replied the justice, who was impressed by Crosby's straightforward and frank air, "that a man was beaten nigh unto death upon the beach last night, and there is reason to believe that some evil work has been going on. You are a stranger here, and I must say that, for a stranger, you have shown undue interest in this circumstance, so much so, that your movements have excited suspicion. I regret the necessity, but I consider that circumstances warrant me in holding you to await any future development."

"Can I see your honor alone in your private room for a few moments?"

"Certainly," replied the judge. "Officer, take Mr. Crosby into my private office, and remain at the door in case I should want your services."

Crosby was led into a room off of court, where he was joined a moment later by the justice.

Taking a document from his pocket Crosby handed it to him. The judge glanced over it, and in a moment his whole manner changed. Extending his hand cordially he was just pronouncing a name when Crosby hissed warningly, and said:

"On no account mention that name, it will ruin all my chances for ferreting out the business upon which I am engaged. This arrest, at best, is very unfortunate for me, as it will call more attention to my movements than I desire. You must contrive some way that no significance will be attached to my discharge."

"That is easily managed," said the judge.

"I will have you committed temporarily, and give out that you have furnished me with reference which I will pretend I wish to investigate. I will subsequently release you in such a

manner that all interest will be allayed as far as you are concerned."

Upon returning to the court-room the judge ordered Crosby to be committed, and in answer to the inquiries of several of the prominent villagers he told them that he guessed there was nothing the matter with Crosby, that he knew nothing about the affair, that he had given satisfactory accounts of himself, and had furnished references as to the truth of his statement. "As soon as I investigate this matter myself," added the justice, "I shall most probably order his immediate release."

That night Zeb Crosby, after again visiting the tavern, and leaving additional directions concerning Skinner, went down to the beach, found his boat as he had left it, entered it, raised his sail, and shot out into the Bay, under a fair wind. But instead of going toward the Ridge from whence he had said he came, he headed straight for the city of New York.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

MINNIE felt that any attempt at further resistance would only bring upon herself personal abuse, and she allowed herself to be led away, as she supposed, to certain death, with a full knowledge that she had been wrenched right from the very grasp of a friendly rescue. The two men did not halt, but hurried her along through brush and across fields, until they came in sight of an old mansion. Toward this they directed their steps, and upon their arrival entered. One of the men still held Minnie, while the other struck a light. At the same moment Mrs. Obitz also entered the room, and held a hurried whispered conversation with the men. Upon its conclusion she came toward Minnie and said:

"My dear, I hope we have overcome any further necessity for violence. I assure you, and I swear it, that I would rather lose my own life than that any harm should come to you, unless you bring it upon yourself, in efforts to escape."

Advancing closer Mrs. Obitz pretended to be wiping the blood from a slight wound on Minnie's temple, when she whispered:

"When I have an opportunity I will convince you of my sincerity; I have an agreeable surprise in store for you, and I only ask that you will exhibit apparent acquiescence; in the end you will find me your friend."

Minnie observed numerous evidences tending to indicate that the old house where she had been brought had not been occupied for a long time, and that very recent additions had been made to the furniture, proving that preparations had been made for, at least, temporary habitation. Mrs. Obitz inquired of Minnie if she would partake of any refreshment, when she replied that she would not object to a cup of tea. This was provided, and Minnie was shown to one of the upper rooms, and an intimation given her that she had better rest while there was an opportunity, as, in all probability, at daylight they would depart for another locality.

Upon entering the room an instant's survey satisfied our heroine that that room had been prepared purposely, so as to serve as a prison if required; and she required no positive confirmation of its purpose, as far as she was concerned, when she heard the key turned on the outside, when Mrs. Obitz left her.

Minnie had come to a state of dogged resignation; her watch told her that it was long past midnight. The excitements and physical exertions of the day had completely worn out her strength, and she felt really grateful, in spite of the uncertainty of her fate, at having this opportunity for rest.

When Mrs. Obitz returned down-stairs after locking Minnie in the room, she found the two men sleeping upon such extemporized beds as they could arrange from the few articles of furniture in the room. She herself now determined to also snatch an hour or two's rest. Thus until daylight everything remained quiet in the house, but at the first signs of approaching day Mrs. Obitz awoke, and after having assured herself as to the safety of her prisoner, she aroused one of the men and directing him to a house about a mile distant, she requested that he would there secure a horse, gallop down to the village, and ascertain what rumors, facts, etc., he could concerning the previous night's adventures.

It was long after noon before her messenger returned, and it was evident to Mrs. Obitz, who had been watching for him, that he had im-

portant news. As he came up she advanced toward him, and inquired eagerly in a low voice: "Well, what news do you bring? Is the whole village on its way here?"

"Not quite," replied the man, "but there is one individual on his way here who is more dangerous to us than if the whole village were coming."

"Who?"

"Sleuth, the great detective."

"Well, all we've got to do then is to get away; we'll have to take refuge for the present over to the Corners. I'll defy Sleuth or anybody else to find us there; although I didn't wish to show my hand to that gang, we'll be compelled to. That beastly lunatic is the cause of so much noise being made over what otherwise would have been a well-managed job."

During the whole forenoon Minnie had remained in the room where Mrs. Obitz had placed her the night before. Substantial refreshment had been furnished, of which she had partaken, and Mrs. Obitz had made certain disclosures which led Minnie to believe, in spite of her unprincipled character, she was likely to prove ultimately her friend. Mrs. Obitz had completely dropped the mask; she made no pretensions to being what she had represented herself; and on the other hand, she had succeeded in convincing Minnie that she was not as bad as represented.

## CHAPTER XXV.

ONCE more we will ask the reader to enter with us the office of Emsley Merritt, the banker. It is the day following the events related in our two previous chapters. The banker's private office is occupied by himself and a lady, the latter's features are concealed under a thick veil, but Mr. Merritt's features exhibit the signs of a recent excitement. For a few moments there had been a pause in their conversation; at length the banker said:

"I don't feel that I would be justified, madame, in satisfying your demands; in the first place, I know nothing about you personally, and the gentleman's balance who drew the order upon me which you have presented will not cover the demand. As to your other allusions, I must reassert my total ignorance of their purpose or meaning."

"Then you positively deny, sir, that you are the real party in this affair?"

"I must beg of you, madame, to be more explicit. Several times you have spoken about this affair. What affair do you allude to?"

"I allude to the abduction of Miss Lamont. I have positive reasons for knowing that you are the real party interested in her temporary if not final removal."

"If you were not a lady, and evidently laboring under some gross mistake, I should send for an officer and have you arrested for an attempt at blackmailing."

"You are at perfect liberty to do so, if you think it is for the best. I am so confident of the correctness of my information that your implied threat does not occasion me the least alarm."

"Well, madame, I shall at least request that you rid me of your presence; if you have been employed in any criminal work at the instigation of any one of my customers, I certainly have nothing to do with it, and you drive me to a statement which regard for your sex would otherwise have restrained me from making. The check which you presented to me for payment is a raised check; the face of it at present calls for four times the amount for which it was originally drawn. Raising checks is a criminal act. Had I so wished, I could have retained it, and had you arrested on that; as it is, I will say nothing about it, but you mustn't think for a moment that I am deceived; you have the privilege of destroying that check, and of obtaining a genuine one from the original maker."

"I don't wish, sir," replied the lady, "to have any further dealings with the maker of that check. In this business I desire to deal with the principal. I raised that check simply because I was not satisfied with the amount originally inserted."

"You are a very bold woman to thus openly avow an act which would send you to prison for a number of years."

"This avowal is not indicative of any more boldness than the admission of having abducted a young lady. And I will go still further—as her abductor, I am not any more liable than the instigator."

"I have nothing to do with all this, madame."



you are certainly laboring under some strange hallucination; your innuendoes have no meaning for me."

"Then it is probably a mistake all around," said the lady, rising. "I have no personal object in restraining Miss Lamont from her liberty. I shall release her at once, and claim her clemency upon the ground of disclosing all I know about the instigators of her abduction."

This last declaration was evidently a contingency which the banker had not anticipated.

The veiled lady made a movement toward the door, as if about to depart, when the banker said, hastily:

"One moment, madame; I don't wish to be the means of interfering with, or blocking any private business of one of my customers. Had you not better hold this matter in abeyance until I have an opportunity of receiving an explanation from the party who employed you?"

"The man who employed me is a notorious criminal, a counterfeiter, and a gambler. We knew that he could have no personal interest in this matter, and if there is no responsible party behind him, we must stop where we are. We certainly have no object in confining this lady, nor money enough to carry it out if we had, especially since we know what powerful friends she has interested in her recovery."

"What powerful friends do you know of who are interested in her fate?" inquired the banker.

"As you disclaim all knowledge of the lady, and all interest in her fate yourself, I don't feel that I would be justified in giving you the information that you seek; in fact, it strikes me as rather singular, in view of your former assertions, that you should wish to know."

"Well, suppose that I should admit that I had an interest."

"I know that you have, whether you admit it or not," said the lady, as a significant laugh rippled out from under her veil.

A few moments later, Mrs. Obitz passed out with a roll of bills hidden in her dress. As she stepped off the stoop on to the sidewalk, an oldish man walked up the steps, she caught but one glance of his face, and for an instant actually staggered. Fortunately for her, and unfortunately for Minnie, the man was so intent upon his own thoughts, that he had not observed her. It would have been well if he had; it was Sleuth.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

UPON entering the banker's office, Sleuth at once observed the paleness of his countenance, and his general haggard appearance. Mr. Merritt was evidently on the point of leaving, when Sleuth intruded himself; the banker said sharply:

"Well, sir, what brings you here?"

"I have business with you," replied Sleuth. "Probably you have forgotten the subject of our last conversation."

"I have not; I recollect that you threw out a number of audacious threats, but you carried them out about as weakly as I anticipated you would."

"Mr. Merritt," said Sleuth, and there was something terribly earnest in the detective's look and tones as he spoke, "there is to come a day of final settlement between you and me; each hour I am adding links to a chain with which I am encircling you—I warn you that there is yet time for you to let the blow fall less heavily. You know that I know that you are the instigator of, if not the actual actor in, Miss Lamont's abduction. Denial is useless; you may refuse to restore her, but it is nonsense for you to attempt to deceive me as to your agency in this disappearance."

"Mr. Sleuth," said the banker, "I have been browbeaten, insulted, and outraged by you until I can endure it no longer; I deny everything. I defy your threats, I invite you to do your worst. You are a scoundrel, and a blackmailer, and a liar, and I am ready to prove every assertion!"

A threatening look overspread Sleuth's face upon hearing these opprobrious epithets applied to him. He had risen from the seat which he had taken immediately upon entering the room, and his fingers closed as he raised his arm, as though his first impulse was to knock the banker down; but he restrained himself, and merely said:

"Be careful, Mr. Merritt; nothing but the peculiar circumstances under which we meet, and the fact that I have much to say to you, de-

ter me from making you eat your words, but I don't wish to bruise your tongue just at present; I wish you to use it to answer a few questions first."

"I reiterate everything that I called you!" said the banker. "I am to be frightened by you no longer. I shall answer no questions, and I wish to have no further conversation with you. I command you to leave my office at once."

"If I obey you," said Sleuth, "it will only be to go before the district attorney, and prefer charges against you that will place you in the Tombs at once. I mean just exactly what I say; now, you can order me out if you choose."

"As far as your threat is concerned, I would have no hesitation in ordering you out, but I have got some little curiosity to learn what fresh devilment you have concocted to come here and tantalize me with."

"Well, your curiosity shall be gratified. In the first place, I would like to ask you if you are still the owner of the mansion on Staten Island, known as the Frenchman's Château?"

In spite of Emsley Merritt's determination to defy Sleuth, it was evident that this query astonished him. For a moment the suddenness and possible significance of the question fairly took the banker's breath away.

It was hardly above a whisper that he replied: "I own different estates on Staten Island; why do you ask about that one in particular?"

"Well, I'll tell you; I've got a proposition to make, and I will prelude it with the information that Miss Lamont passed night before last under the very roof, in charge of a certain infamous character, whom, if I chose, I could name. Now, then, as I have positive proof of this, added to numerous previous facts, I want to ask you, now you dare stand there, and deny that you had any hand in Miss Lamont's abduction. If you had not, doesn't it strike you as a singular fact that she should have been taken upon the very night of her abduction, immediately after the attempted murder of her attendant, direct to the deserted mansion owned by you, which only a few days previously had been furnished for the reception of guests, even to the arrangement of iron bars to one of the bedroom windows, and other prison-like arrangements?"

"That may be a remarkable coincidence," replied the banker, "but that is all that it is. If these are the only grounds that you have for suspecting my agency in this matter, I will assure you that I can furnish satisfactory proofs that my property was leased regularly by a well-known house agent, and that I know nothing concerning my tenants. If any such alterations have been made in my house, such as you mention, it was done without my knowledge or consent as the landlord."

"Mr. Merritt, I am too thoroughly versed in my business to be thus easily thrown off the track; I stated that I had a proposition to make to you. The first portion of it I will make now. I want you to restore Miss Lamont to her friends; when you have done this, I will make one other proposition which will terminate all hostility between you and me, and remove any cause for a desire on your part to make away with Miss Lamont. If you decline this proposition, I assure you that I will publish a story which will create more amazement than any criminal sensation which has attracted the attention of the citizens of New York for many years."

"It's strange, Mr. Sleuth, how you persist in holding over me the threat of some terrible denunciation. I have before invited you to execute your threats. I can't accede to either of your propositions, for two simple reasons. As to Miss Lamont, I know nothing about her, consequently I can not comply with your demand. The detail of your second proposition not having been stated, I certainly can not comply with that."

"Then you positively reject my overtures for a compromise?"

"I do not know of any matters that I have to compromise."

"Then I will tell you a singular fact. If you are wise, you will see how an unseen Nemesis is following you. You will recognize how the very measures that you are taking to cover up a crime are leading toward its denouement. Miss Lamont was inveigled to Staten Island; what the ultimate intention was by such inveiglement, I don't know; but I know this, that it led the poor orphan girl direct to the grave of her murdered father!"

Upon hearing this declaration, the banker,

who was standing, staggered backward like one stricken by a sudden blow.

"My God!" he cried, "how do you know that it was the grave of her father?"

"Because the body of the murdered man floated ashore, with the evidence of his identity upon his person. His name is inscribed upon his head-stone, in the lonely little grave-yard on the bay shore, not ten miles distant from the house where you resided when the murder was committed."

"He was already—" the banker stopped.

"Already what?" inquired Sleuth, quickly.

"Already buried," replied the banker, completely bewildered, and yet feeling compelled to finish the unfortunate sentence which he had begun. "Yes, yes," he continued, "he was already buried before I knew anything about the circumstance."

"Then you admit," said Sleuth, "that you knew that the body of the man who floated ashore, and was buried in the little grave-yard, was the father of Miss Minnie Lamont?"

"I admit nothing of the kind," replied the banker; "I only admit knowing about the circumstance of the body having been found. I did not know of his connection to Miss Lamont, only by your statement that it was so a moment ago."

"If you knew nothing about the murdered man, how comes it that the chain which he wore when last seen alive, has been in your possession, by your own admission, since the date of his disappearance; and why did you employ a professional thief, when every other means had failed, to steal its counterpart from Miss Lamont's neck?"

The last words of the detective fell upon unconscious ears. With the exclamation, "Oh, my God!" the banker had fallen back unconscious. Sleuth opened the office-door, and summoning one of the clerks, said, hurriedly:

"Tell Mr. Merritt I will call here to-morrow; he has fainted; attend to him; be sure and tell him when he revives that Sleuth will call to-morrow."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

THE day following his interview with Sleuth, Mr. Merritt remained away from his office. At the usual hour of his arrival in the morning, a message came, informing his confidential clerk that Mr. Merritt was seriously indisposed and directing that all letters and other important dispatches should be sent to his house. About noon Sleuth called, and was informed that the result of his former interview was such that Mr. Merritt would not probably be at his office for a week.

That same afternoon the man known as Zeb Crosby took the boat for Staten Island. Upon his arrival there Crosby found his protégé much better; in fact, quite rational; but the invalid was exceedingly reticent, and unwilling to answer questions. Finally, Crosby disclosed enough of his knowledge concerning the affair to cause Skinner to inquire who he was.

"I am a particular friend of Miss Lamont," replied Crosby.

"You are not the one she mentioned," said Skinner. "I can not recall the name now, but it was not Crosby."

"Was the name Sleuth?"

Upon the mention of this name the wounded man rose partly up in bed as he answered quickly, "Yes, yes, Sleuth, that's the name; Sleuth the detective. Do you know him?" he added, eagerly.

"Yes, I know him," replied Crosby, and he reached over and whispered something in Skinner's ear.

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Skinner.

"I am telling you the truth," replied Crosby, "and nothing but the truth, as sure as I am a breathing man."

"Then there is no reason why I should not tell all the circumstances to you;" and Skinner related to Crosby all that he had told to Minnie, and the circumstances which followed his meeting with her up to the time that he was struck senseless. His statement was, that while walking with the two men for the purpose of acting as a protector to Minnie, one of them turned suddenly and struck at him with a bludgeon, which had hitherto been concealed. It was then that he fired the pistol. But the next moment, and before he could discharge a second shot he was beaten to the earth by both villains.

Crosby succeeded in obtaining from the victim minute descriptions of the personal appear-



ance of his two assailants. But it was the previous part of the story which seemed to interest him the most.

He exerted his utmost ingenuity to hit upon some little fact or suggestion which would assist into welding the missing link to the chain of memory in Skinner's mind; but beyond a certain point, the poor fellow's recollection was a perfect blank.

Skinner had said that he believed the mention of a certain name would assist his memory. Crosby had gone over a great number of names; again and again he had mentioned the name of Emsley Merritt, but did not elicit the least indication of recognition.

Skinner had constantly spoken of a phantom face which was fastened to his memory. He had asseverated that he would know that face in the flesh, if he could ever come across it.

Crosby, who was really our friend Sleuth, as our readers have already surmised, in another disguise, thought he could show him that phantom face in the flesh—at least he was resolved to try. Convinced that it would be some days before he could test his experiment, Sleuth made ample provision for Skinner's further care, and returned in the late boat to New York.

The next morning, from the time that the doors of the banker's office were opened up to noon, every person entering the bank was observed by a pair of keen eyes inclosed behind an opposite window. If the party watching anticipated the arrival of the banker himself, he was disappointed; but about noon another party entered the bank, whose appearance seemingly greatly interested the watcher, as he at once left his lookout point, and passing down the stairs, took a position upon the sidewalk, directly opposite the bank. In about five minutes the party whose entrance into Merritt's office had caused Sleuth to take a position on the sidewalk, came out and passed rapidly up the street, closely "piped" by the detective.

As the man came down the steps from the bank, Sleuth had observed him slip a letter into his side pocket.

As he turned into Broadway, and stood waiting for a stage, Sleuth passed close to him and scanned his features intently.

To avoid observation, the detective passed on up the street, and happening to glance at a passing stage coming down town, he saw Emsley Merritt, who was a passenger in it. At the same instant a rather fancily dressed effeminate-looking youth tapped Sleuth upon the shoulder. Turning suddenly, he said:

"Halloo!" and was about passing on without any further remark, when suddenly a thought struck him; he wheeled about and quickly overtook the youth who had resumed his saunter down the street. This time it was Sleuth's time to tap him upon the shoulder; the second meeting was followed by a few moments' rapid conversation.

The youth who had a very sharp, shrewd expression of countenance, nodded significantly, in answer to the hurried remarks of the detective. Owing to a sudden blockade, which is a very common occurrence in that part of Broadway, the stage in which the banker was a passenger, was stopped for some little time, and the up stage of the same line—for which the man Sleuth had been following, was evidently waiting—had also been stopped. This delay enabled the detective to put in execution a daring scheme which had suddenly flashed through his mind; and at the very instant the police had succeeded in making a headway for the jam of vehicles, Sleuth and the young man separated. The detective passed up Broadway to Cedar Street, and took a position under the shadow of the large building standing upon that corner; while the young man advanced to the man whom Sleuth had been watching, and who was just stepping off the sidewalk, to enter a stage which he had hailed, and said:

"I believe you are looking for Mr. Merritt, the banker."

"How do you know that I am looking for Mr. Merritt?" replied the man, sharply, and with an air of sudden suspicion.

"I was in the bank when I heard you inquire for him," replied the youth, promptly.

"Well, what if I am?" said the man.

"Nothing particular; only I saw Mr. Merritt coming down in a stage, and as I heard you inquiring for him, I thought, as a matter of kindness, I would let you know. There he is," added the youth, pointing to the banker, who had at length succeeded in reaching the corner of Wall Street, and was just alighting from the stage.

"Are you sure that's he?" said the man, moving toward the individual indicated.

"That's he," said the youth, following close upon the man's heels. A few steps below Broadway, in Wall Street, the man succeeded in overtaking the banker, and after an assurance that he was the person sought, handed him a letter. The banker, who was evidently surprised, opened the letter, and after glancing at a few words, a deathly pallor overspread his face; and although his hand trembled, he read the missive through; then crumpling it in his hand he thrust it in the tail pocket of his coat, and turning to the man, said:

"Well, is there anything further?"

"Do you understand the note?"

"Yes," replied the banker.

"Then it's all right," said the man, and moved rapidly away.

The banker stood for a moment watching his receding figure, and then turned slowly, and walked in the direction of his office; at the same instant, the youth who had pointed him out as Mr. Merritt, came up lightly behind. At the corner of the street, quite a crowd gathered suddenly to read a stock bulletin, which had just been placarded by a telegraph company.

In a moment, both the banker and the young man were in the very center of a crowd of well-dressed, excited men. Mr. Merritt soon succeeded in elbowing his way through, and a few moments later entered his office.

After passing the usual salutations with his clerks, he passed into his private office, and thrust his hand into his coat pocket for the note he had received from the stranger; but with a sudden start discovered that it was not in the pocket where he supposed he had placed it. He now made a hurried examination of every pocket about his person, but failed to find the letter.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed, in the excitement and shock of the moment; "I must have failed to put it in my pocket, and have probably dropped it upon the sidewalk. I must go back and look for it. Fortunately it was not addressed, and it will not indicate anything to any one who might happen to find it. Still I am sorry I have lost it."

The banker went back and looked thoroughly for the letter, but without success. At the time Mr. Merritt emerged through the sudden crowd which had surrounded him in one direction, the youth whom we described as close upon his heels, broke from it on the other. There was a triumphant look upon his countenance, and a glitter of success in his eye, as with a more business-like air, and hurried step, he retraced his way up Wall Street, and so around to the corner, where he found Sleuth evidently waiting for him. Sleuth was leaning in a nonchalant manner against the iron rail of the stoop, when the youth approached. The keen eye of the officer detected at once that this suddenly conceived device had resulted in some kind of a success. As the youth came up, he said:

"Well, old man, I wasn't gone long."

"No," replied Sleuth, in a low voice, "you are back quick enough; but did you succeed in bringing the two parties together?"

"I guess I did."

"Did you keep in their shadow, and overhear anything they said?"

"Well, no, I didn't hear much, because they didn't say much."

"Did you find out that fellow's business with the banker?"

"Well, that remains to be seen. The chap that was looking for the banker just made sure that he was the man he wanted, and then handed him a note. The old fellow read it, and then asked if there was anything more; the other one said: 'Do you understand the note?' The banker answered 'yes'; then the other fellow just said again: 'That's all right!' and left."

"By —!" exclaimed Sleuth, with an oath, an unusual thing for him, "I'd give five hundred dollars to know what was in that note!"

"Well, do you know, old man, that it just struck me that the note might be of some service to you, so I just laid close under the old man. I saw him slip it into his coat tail pocket. We got jammed in a crowd at the corner of Broad Street, and when we got out the old man had lost his note. I found it and here it is!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

"JERUSALEM!" cried Sleuth, as the young man handed him the note, which he had so adroitly purloined from the pocket of the un-

suspecting banker. Upon glancing at the note, the detective read the following words:

"This note will be handed to you by one of the 'guild.' If you wish to come before the burial, you will find an escort to meet you upon the arrival of the last boat from New York to-night.

"Respectfully yours,

"THE GRAVE DIGGER."

That same night, Emsley Merritt might have been seen walking slowly down Broadway, toward the Staten Island Ferry.

The boat which left New York for Staten Island at nine o'clock, and which, at this time, was the last boat from the city, had just come in. The night was dark and rainy, and the few passengers as they came ashore, were rushing madly through the open gates, for the purpose of securing seats in the various public conveyances. As is usual with passengers coming off ferry-boats—and especially upon rainy nights—they rushed pell-mell, without any regard to the personal safety and convenience of incoming passengers; and the consequence was, that just as Mr. Merritt passed through the foot-passengers' gate-way, an oldish-looking man was knocked down, by being run against violently.

This accident resulted in bringing several others down, who tripped over the prostrate forms of the first two. The banker stood surveying the parties to this little tumbling arrangement, when suddenly his eye fell upon the oldish-looking man, who had been the first knocked down, and who was just rising to his feet. The instant his eye caught sight of this individual, Mr. Merritt turned away, and walked rapidly on board the boat. As he passed up the stairway to the upper deck, the banker grated his teeth, and clinching his fist convulsively, in the very madness of a certain discovery, exclaimed as he struck out, as if aiming at some imaginary foe:

"Did that devil see me? Is it a coincidence that brought him upon this boat, or is he dogging my steps? If he is, let him beware."

In the meantime, Sleuth—for he it was who had been knocked down—had regained his feet, and passed on to the boat. Instead of going to the upper deck, he passed along to the forward part of the boat, and keeping himself just within shelter from the rain, squatted on an empty box. It was a singular coincidence that, as he seated himself, the subject of his thoughts was whether the banker had recognized him. He reckoned that if the banker should become aware of his presence, measures would be successfully adopted to thwart the object for which he was shadowing him.

Thus matters stood, when in the gloom and chill of that stormy night the boat was made fast to the landing. From the upper deck, Emsley Merritt peered through the darkness to see Sleuth go ashore. The banker seemed satisfied in his own mind that he had not been observed, and was apparently acting under the impression that the presence of Sleuth upon that particular boat was a mere accident. On the other hand, Sleuth had secured a position near the gang-plank, but beyond the range of observation. He, too, was acting under the impression that he had not been recognized, and was waiting and watching to see the banker go ashore. This holding back on the part of both at length caused a suspicion to creep into the minds of both men that after all they were each mistaken, and had been seen and recognized by each other.

Sleuth was the first to come to this conclusion; and acting upon a sudden impulse, he sprang across the gang-plank, and rapidly disappeared in the darkness up the pier. It was some time before Mr. Merritt left the boat; in fact, he seemed disinclined to leave it at all. He still stood leaning against the upper railing overlooking the deck, when he saw the form of a man pass over the stream of light thrown out by the dock-lamp, and the next moment saw him cross the gang-plank and come on board. The momentary glance the banker had had of this individual while under the glare of the light, was sufficient for him to recognize the advancing party as the person who had given him the note that same day in New York. He now left his position, and passed down upon the lower deck. Upon arriving near the forward part of the boat he a second time beheld the man, and by aid of the deck-light succeeded in attracting his attention, and signaled to him to come toward him. As the man came near, the banker said to him: "Are you on the lookout for a party from New York?"



"I am," replied the man; "and if I am not mistaken you are the person I was sent to conduct to a certain house where you have business."

"Well, come this way; a little incident has occurred which makes it necessary for us to be very cautious," and as the banker spoke, he led his companion out of the glare of the light into the shadow abait the wheel.

Coming to a halt, he said, in a low whisper: "I have reason to believe that I have been followed."

"That is impossible," replied his companion.

"What are we to do in case we are followed? Our business to-night won't stand scrutiny."

"Leave that to me; if the party whom you suspect takes it upon himself to follow us, I'll take care of his case."

"You don't know who it is. I think it is no more than fair to tell you, as the chances would be against you otherwise. The man who came down in the boat with me and passed up off the dock a few moments ago, was Sleuth."

Merritt's companion started. "It's well you told me," he said; "this alters the case entirely—a man who's got to buck against Sleuth mustn't do it blind; it's well you told me who it was. But even Sleuth must not interfere with to-night's business. I have it in for him anyhow; the score might as well be wiped out to-night as any time; but, come, let us go." And the two men passed off the boat and walked rapidly, but with their eyes about them, through the darkness up the dock.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

THE two men who had just left the boat proceeded but a few steps when Merritt suddenly clutched the arm of his companion, and at the same instant whispered, "Don't stop," but after they had gone a few steps further, again spoke and said, "Did you see him?"

"I saw no one."

"Well, then, your eyes are not very sharp; he is stretched out upon the string-piece on the edge of the dock. I saw and recognized him in spite of the darkness."

"Well, I'll tell you what to do. You know the route to the old chateau?"

"I do," replied Mr. Merritt.

"You know the road from there over to the Price Farm; it is to the latter you are to go; you'll have to walk it, because the hiring of a vehicle will attract attention. You go ahead, and leave me to throw this fellow off the scent."

The banker hesitated a moment, and then spoke to his companion in a low, hurried tone. Finally, the latter said:

"Well, it's the only chance now; we'll face him and odd and even on the result!" As he spoke, he turned and walked back on the dock followed by the banker. They saw no signs of any one, until they reached the extreme front edge of the dock; there, through the darkness, seated upon the string-piece, they beheld the form of a man. As they approached, the figure arose, when Merritt's companion exclaimed:

"Look here, old fellow, what's your business loafing round here?"

"I don't give an account of my business to outlaws, Charley Wiseman," replied Sleuth, for he it was.

"Ah, you know me, then, do you, mister?"

"Yes, I know you; and that greater criminal with you; I know you both; your business to-night is mine."

"I don't know as we invited you in on this work," said Charley Wiseman, and as he spoke, he glanced his eye rapidly around over the dock, and by a sudden movement of his foot he kicked the detective over into the water.

As Sleuth fell over, both Merritt and Wiseman rushed to the edge and peered over into the darkness to see if they could see anything of the struggling form of their victim; but he had either sunk instantly or had been whirled out into the stream by the fierce rushing tide.

Wiseman now led the banker up the dock, when he turned to the left, and instead of going through the village, took his course along the beach.

Twenty minutes' rapid walking brought the two men in sight of the immense boulder, several times alluded to before, as obstructing the beach. Here they branched up the path leading to the chateau. As they passed across the garden, within a hundred feet of the mansion, Wiseman suddenly stopped, and said excitedly:

"Thunder and lightning! there's a light in

the chateau; there's somebody there. You stand here a moment till I just take a squint."

Wiseman stole cautiously up under the windows. The creaks in the old, decayed shutters afforded him a chance to look into the room. As he did so, he exclaimed in a low voice to himself: "Good gracious! what does this mean? There's Lizzie herself, and she appears to be all alone."

He now stole stealthily around to the door. Seizing the knocker, he gave a single rap, and then, after an interval, two in quick succession, neither of them very loud. He waited a moment, when a movement of the light and a moment later the sound of a step indicated that the rap had been heard and the signal understood. The bolts were shortly shoved back, the door opened to a crack, and the pale face of Mrs. Obitz appeared at the aperture. She said: "Is that you, Charley?"

"Yes," answered Wiseman.

"Has he come?" inquired Mrs. Obitz.

"He has; but what's the meaning of this change of programme? It was only by an accident that we came past the chateau, and I saw the light. I was on my way, according to previous directions, to the other house."

"There is time enough to explain the change some other time. If the banker is there bring him right in, everything is prepared."

A moment later, the banker was ushered into the hall.

"Are you ready to look upon the body?" inquired Mrs. Obitz, in a thick, husky whisper; and as she spoke, the lamp which she held in her hand fairly vibrated in her nervous grasp.

"That is the business which brought me here," replied the banker. "I am ready."

"Then follow me," said Mrs. Obitz, and she led the way up to the same room where Minnie Lamont had been confined upon the first night of her abduction. As Mrs. Obitz opened the door and stepped into the room, the banker beheld a bed, and under a sheet spread over it was plainly visible the outlines of a human form. Great beads of sweat started upon the banker's forehead, and rolled down his ghastly visage, as Mrs. Obitz drew him to the center of the room; then loosing her grasp upon his arm, she stepped to the bed, pulled down the sheet, and disclosed the calm, marble features of Minnie Lamont, the banker's innocent victim.

A groan struggled up from Mr. Merritt's bosom, as, trembling like one shaken by a palsy, he gasped: "When did she die?"

"This morning," replied Mrs. Obitz; and her countenance was not less ghastly than that of the banker.

"Was it a natural death?" inquired the banker.

"It was."

"Thank God!" murmured he; "I am satisfied."

Mrs. Obitz immediately replaced the sheet over the marble features, and the two guilty wretches stole out of the room.

## CHAPTER XXX.

OUR readers will recollect that when Wiseman was conducting Emsley Merritt past the house known as the chateau, he expressed considerable surprise upon seeing a light in the old mansion. The first words which he addressed to Mrs. Obitz, when she opened the door, also indicated that he expected that the scene about to be enacted was to have occurred at another house. According to the original arrangement, it was intended that the scheme should be carried out at the house alluded to before, as the place where Minnie had been conveyed upon the morning when word was brought that Sleuth was upon their track. This house the villagers had long looked upon with suspicion, as the resort of characters engaged in some unlawful calling; and upon that very night, after the departure of Wiseman, for the purpose of meeting the banker at the landing, news had been brought by one of the many confederates of the parties who were in the habit of meeting there, that the house was about to be subjected that very night to a thorough search; firstly, on account of the affair with Skinner, and secondly, owing to a rumor which had recently gained credence, that it was a manufactory for counterfeit money. This news had come but a short time previous to that which Mrs. Obitz had designed as the most fitting for administering the potion to Minnie, and which was to throw her into a slumber sufficiently profound for the purpose the crafty woman had in

view. That very night she had informed Minnie, that upon the following day she should be restored to her friends. With this hope, freshly kindled in her heart, Minnie was retiring, when Mrs. Obitz came into the room in a state of great excitement, and informed the imprisoned girl that a party of noted criminals, both male and female, were to arrive at the house that night.

"My dear," she added, with an air of seeming frankness, "I do not wish to have you brought in contact with these people, because I suspect they are coming here for no other purpose than to have a grand spree."

Minnie's pure face paled with dread at the mere thought of being under the roof with such characters, and she exclaimed:

"Is there no way for us to get out of the house, until after these parties are gone? I promise you, on my honor, that if you will take me to some other place I will make no effort to escape."

"That is just what I was about to propose," said Mrs. Obitz. "I have heretofore explained to you how by your abduction I have served both you and myself. You may not believe me, but I will once again declare that, even as wicked as I have been, I have come to feel so toward you, that I would lose my own life before any real harm should happen to you."

"Mrs. Obitz, I believe you; although I can never justify the deceit you have practiced toward me; still I give you the credit for what later kindness you have shown me."

"Would you be afraid to spend a night alone with me in the old chateau?"

"Of the two evils I would rather choose the least; I would rather spend the night almost anywhere in preference to remaining here, after what you have just told me."

"Well, we must steal out, then, without being observed. I will return in a moment," and Mrs. Obitz left the room. In about ten minutes she returned. During her absence she had made all necessary arrangements, including the directions as to what should be done upon the arrival of Charley Wiseman and the banker. An hour later, when Wiseman, by accident, discovered the light in the old house, and went to see who was there, Mrs. Obitz had just completed her arrangements. She had got Minnie to bed and administered a potion of her own manufacture which she knew to be harmless in the end. Its effects were instantaneous and so decided that she was actually frightened, so death-like was Minnie's appearance.

The reader has already learned the successful result of her ruse. Emsley Merritt was completely deceived. It was with a sigh of relief that both left the room. Mrs. Obitz turned the key in the door of the room, where the supposed corpse lay, and not a word was spoken until they gained the lower room.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

WHEN Emsley Merritt started forth alone from the chateau, after having refused company, he had two objects in view. In the first place, he had resolved upon walking all night, for the purpose of taking the boat in the morning from the North Shore. Secondly, he wished to arrange a train of circumstances, so that, if necessary, backed by his position and influence, he could establish an *alibi* in case any trouble should come of the encounter upon the dock.

In former times he had been well acquainted with all the roads upon Staten Island, but it had been a great many years since he had traversed any of them. Thus far, he had found his way without any difficulty, but he had now come to a place where his road branched abruptly in two directions, and he was puzzled which one to take. If it had been a clear night, he might have recognized some familiar object which would have indicated the proper direction. As it was, he was compelled to trust to luck and took the left-hand road. It was particularly rough, and every once in awhile he was precipitated forward, and frequently fell prone to the ground. Still he floundered along, satisfied that the path must bring him out right in the end, when suddenly he struck against a stone, and fell forward with greater velocity than upon any of his previous falls.

As he reached forward to raise himself, with a chill of horror, he felt his hand cut the air. The truth flashed upon his mind that he was extended over a precipice. In the terror of this sudden realization, he gave utterance to a terri-



fied scream for help; threw his hands wildly about, and the next moment he felt himself slip forward and fall, whirling through space. With a fearful crash he struck upon the bottom, rolled over two or three times, then lay motionless upon his back, his white face turned up, while the drizzling rain pattered down, and washed off the fresh blood as it trickled from a wound in his forehead.

Shortly after daylight upon the following morning, a boy, who was employed to do chores about the tavern where Hank Skinner had been taken, was on his way to the tavern after having spent the night at his mother's. He was coming along the same path over which the great banker had passed the night previously. As he turned and passed along the edge of the precipice, he was brought to a sudden stop by hearing a groan. The boy was startled; but being a courageous lad, he listened to hear from what direction the groan came. For a moment he heard nothing; then, again, the same sound which had first attracted his attention.

Crawling to the edge of the precipice, he looked over, and with a sudden exclamation of horror, beheld, at the bottom, the form of a man, whose white and ghastly face, smeared with blood, presented a horrible appearance. The boy gave but one glance; then rising, hurried with the speed of a young antelope toward the tavern, where he shortly afterward arrived, and breathlessly related the horrible sight that he had seen. Guided by the boy, and followed by several of the usual tavern loungers, the landlord soon arrived at the place where the mutilated form of Mr. Merritt lay.

The distance was not far, and with the assistance of the men who had come with him, the tavern-keeper succeeded in bringing the wounded man to his house.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Merritt had been for nearly a week at the tavern, and was now rapidly recovering. He had communicated with his family, but had forbidden any of them remaining with him.

Upon the second Sunday following the mishap, he was so far recovered as to be able to sit in a chair on the balcony. While sitting there upon the afternoon in question, Hank Skinner, who had sufficiently recovered to be able to go about, was sitting in the bar-room by the window, when he suddenly caught a glimpse of the banker's face. Hank fairly jumped to his feet upon beholding that face. At the time there was no one in the bar-room but himself, consequently his sudden excitement escaped observation, and afforded him an opportunity to look at the features of the man whose face had given him such a shock, without being observed himself. He could not fairly recall where he had seen it, and yet there was something strangely familiar in that clear-cut profile—the banker sat in such a position as to expose only his side face. Hank's first impulse was to go out upon the balcony and address him, but a second thought restrained him. Every familiar face that Hank had seen for the last two years, he in some way connected with that of the shadow face, which, like a weird specter, had indistinctly haunted his memory night and day, ever since the recovery of his reason. He had frequently before met faces which he at first thought he recognized as the one he was seeking, but, upon every occasion, subsequent discoveries had proven that he was mistaken.

He feared that it might be so in this case; yet the one glance which he had of Mr. Merritt's face had impressed him more profoundly than any he had ever met before. Already it had so affected him that remote glimmers of awakening recollection flashed upon his mind, and he determined to have a nearer and closer scrutiny of those features. With this purpose in view, he passed out of the back door, intending to take a cut around, and so come up the road to the front of the tavern, so as to make it appear as though he had come up accidentally; but by the time he had executed this little maneuver, Mr. Merritt had retired within doors.

Hank seated himself upon the steps of the stoop, and, settling his face in his hands, began to think. But the utmost exercise of his thinking powers failed to recall that lost link in his life. After awhile, going into the bar-room, he inquired carelessly of the tavern-keeper who that man was that he had seen a short time previously upon the balcony.

"That was Mr. Merritt, the great banker," replied the landlord.

"Mr. Merritt, the great banker," repeated Hank to himself. "Emsley Merritt?" he said, again addressing the landlord.

"Yes, sir—Emsley Merritt, of Wall Street." "How did he come to be here?" inquired Hank.

"He used to be a resident of Staten Island many years ago, and is still a heavy property owner. About a week back, he came down to settle some matters concerning his property, and got detained until late in the night. It seems it was necessary for him to be in New York early in the morning, and he started to walk to the village for the purpose of taking the first boat; but as luck would have it, he lost his road, and attempted to take a short-cut. It being dark, and not knowing the way, he tumbled over the cliff back here, and lay there, until found by my boy in the morning. So you see, old man Hank," added the landlord, "according to the old adage: 'The more haste the less speed.' The old money-bags was too anxious to get back to his ducats, and the consequence is, it'll be a week longer before he can get away."

Hank turned away and took a stroll; but all the way he kept constantly repeating: "Emsley Merritt, Emsley Merritt, stranger!" he soliloquized; "but that is the very name the great detective Sleuth kept repeating to me, when trying to assist my memory to recall past events. I wonder where Sleuth is. I have not seen him for eight or nine days. But I must see that man again—I must scrutinize those features when he is not aware of my scrutiny." For a moment he thought, then added, as a sudden idea struck him: "I have it. I'll study those features—I'll fathom this thing before the coming dawn."

That night Emsley Merritt lay upon his bed; he had just fallen into a troubled sleep. Suddenly he started, opened his eyes, and half rose in the bed, and beheld standing close beside him the form of Hank Skinner. A strange light glittered in the eyes of the supposed phantom, as it apparently glided from the room, when the tortured man who lay upon the bed gave utterance to one wild scream, and fell back upon his pillow, totally unconscious. Thus he was found by the startled landlord, and others, as they rushed into his room.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

"GOOD-MORNING, darling. How do you feel after your night's rest?" These words were addressed to Minnie by Mrs. Obitz, as she entered her room, upon the morning succeeding that fearful night when the Frenchwoman had played such a remarkable deception upon the banker. "How did you rest last night?" added she, before Minnie had time to answer the previous question.

"I rested very well," replied Minnie; "but I had the strangest dream—the most horrible dream I ever had in my life—and it has left such a strange impression on my mind; but—my goodness!" she exclaimed, suddenly, as she caught a glimpse of Mrs. Obitz's face, which was terribly bruised; "what on earth has happened to you?"

Mrs. Obitz turned pale, and raising her finger meaningly, said, "Hush! I will tell you some future time."

"Something dreadful has happened, I know," said Minnie, in an undertone.

"Yes, yes, something has happened," said Mrs. Obitz; "and you shall hear in good time what it was. But come, tell me first about your dream. I'm very superstitious, you know. I believe in dreams; tell me yours."

"Well, I will tell it, but it seems too horrible to have any facts whereupon it was based, and they say all dreams have. You mustn't be offended, because you figured in it with an ugly prominence. You must remember that it was only a dream."

"I dreamed that I was dead, and lay in this room upon this bed, with a sheet thrown over me. That you entered the room with a lamp in your hand, followed by Emsley Merritt, the banker. I dreamed that you crossed the room, removed the covering from off my face, and turning to Mr. Merritt, said, 'Are you satisfied?' and he replied, 'I am.' It seems now that I can see the horrid glare of his eyes, and the terrified shrinking of his form as he gazed upon my face. It was dreadful, wasn't it? Ever since I awoke, I have been thinking about it; the only foundation I can conceive for such a strange somnolent vagary, is the fact of your telling me of the awful intent of Mr. Merritt, when he employed you to assist in my abduction."

During this narration, Mrs. Obitz's face ex-

hibited a curious study; surprise, doubt, sudden alarm at the suggestion that it was not a dream, and that Minnie really understood what desperate chances she had taken. Then, again, incredulity, and finally, a settled look of genuine sorrow and sadness covered her face. Minnie observed the latter, and added:

"But come. Dreams, you know, go by contraries, and I have drawn quite encouraging auguries, although it was such a horrible and life-like one."

"Minnie," said Mrs. Obitz, abruptly, "I wish to ask you one question, and I want you to answer me frankly and truly; and there was a sad earnestness in Mrs. Obitz's tone and manner as she continued: "Do you really believe, that no matter what may have been my former purpose as concerning you, that I am now really and truly your friend, and anxious to restore you to your friends?"

For a moment Minnie hesitated. At length she said, "I hope so."

"I wish you to believe so."

"Is not my trust at present sufficient? Won't it be time enough to believe when I am actually restored to the few friends that I have?"

"No; as things are now, it will not. To befriend you it will be necessary to assume an attitude of indifference, and to apparently render assistance to our enemies. Things have turned out differently from what I anticipated. Since certain occurrences last night, I am now more your friend than ever; and yet I have less power to assist you openly."

Minnie looked grave. She felt that the rupture which had evidently taken place between Mrs. Obitz and her confederates was even more serious than she had supposed; but after a moment, she said: "There is no other course open for me; I do believe in your friendship and truthfulness, as far as it is possible for me to do so."

"I only require that you should believe in me so far as to confide in me, and under all circumstances do as I request, no matter how strange and apparently contrary it may be. You have now a more dangerous and decided enemy to contend against than any you have had before; and what makes matters worse, you are in his power, and he is actuated by feelings which will make him take any risk. There are some people whose love is more dangerous than their hatred. Unfortunately, a reckless, desperate scoundrel has conceived a violent passion for you. This hint is sufficient to give you an intimation of your new peril."

"Oh, my God!" cried Minnie; "am I never to be rescued from this constant succession of evils and misfortunes? But come, tell me all the facts, Mrs. Obitz; let me know my peril just as it is, and I will be better able to meet it."

"Probably you will. Last night Emsley Merritt was in this house. It is not necessary for me to explain all that occurred; it is sufficient to state that we succeeded in fooling him as far as his intention went concerning you, so as to secure from him the promised reward. Now, if we had the help of your friend, Harry Loveland?"

At this abrupt allusion to Harry, Minnie exhibited, for the first time, decided emotion, as she said:

"I know not; I fear and dread the worst. Harry is brave, impetuous, and rash; and I know, unless something has befallen him, long ere this he would have tracked me out. I tremble when I think; I fear that the same person who was the cause of my abduction has, in some way, rendered Harry powerless to aid me. And what causes me still greater surprise, is the fact that Harry's friend, Sleuth, the most noted detective in New York, has not been able to trace my whereabouts. I have thought this whole matter over. It strikes me that decided clues were left for such a shrewd man as Sleuth to follow. I have wondered and wondered, and wearied myself trying to account for my being apparently thus left to my fate."

"You have not been," said Mrs. Obitz. "The very same night that you were brought here, Sleuth was upon your track. Half an hour after we left here, upon the following morning, Sleuth was in this house, and in this very room, but—" and Mrs. Obitz hesitated, but after a moment, resumed, and said: "Our only dependence now for outside help is Harry Loveland. Sleuth was on his way to this very château last night, and his life was the penalty for his faith and friendship for you."

Minnie gave utterance to a scream, as Mrs. Obitz added rapidly: "You now have more evidence of the character of the desper-



scoundrel with whom we have to contend. Sleuth evidently judged, and, as it subsequently proved, correctly, that the quickest way to find you, was to shadow the movements of Emsley Merritt, supposing, naturally, that he would have a reason for visiting you in your place of concealment. Sleuth came to Staten Island last night in the same boat with Emsley Merritt. Charley Wiseman was at the landing for the purpose of meeting the banker and escorting him to this place. In the darkness and gloom upon the pier, they encountered Sleuth. A desperate struggle ensued, and your faithful friend, the great detective, was thrown into the bay."

"Then, oh! my God!" murmured Minnie, "all help is gone!"

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

Upon the morning following Mr. Merritt's fright at beholding the supposed apparition of Hank Skinner, he dispatched a messenger to New York for his son and private carriage, determined not to pass another night under that roof. Early in the afternoon he was removed by his son to the city. It so happened that Hank Skinner was away when he left, having started in the first boat in the morning, to New York, with the intention of trying to find Sleuth. His entrance into the banker's room upon the night previous was purely accidental. In passing through the hall, he found the door of Mr. Merritt's room ajar, and, supposing it to be the room of another person, entered, having suddenly recollected something he wished to say. In an instant, he discovered his mistake, but the pale features of the sleeping banker, fully disclosed by the clear rays of the moon, riveted his gaze. He advanced into the center of the room, and while gazing, suddenly, like a flash, his memory returned so far as to cause a recognition, at the very instant the banker awoke.

He retreated rapidly from the room, in time to avoid being seen by those who were rushing to Mr. Merritt's assistance. The lost link was supplied in Hank Skinner's life. His mind went back and picked up the lost threads of memory, and vividly reproduced each detail of the horrors of that eventful night and succeeding morning, when Emsley Merritt attempted to murder him, in the gloom of that early dawn.

It went even beyond that; it commenced at the very first link of the horrible chain of events. The discovery of the man robbing a dead body—the meeting upon the lonely Bay Ridge beach—the recognition of the robber—the towing of the body out into the middle of the stream—the dispute over the spoils—and the final horror, when Emsley Merritt—the now wealthy banker—in the face of his cries for mercy, threw him into the dark waters of the bay. From thence, all to him was blank. The shock of that awful fate banished the recording faculty, and from that hour up to the time that his reasoning powers returned there had been for him no record.

In his own room he thought all these matters over, and fairly shuddered at the terrible exactness of some unseen power of justice, which, after many years, was tracing directly home to the guilty a disclosure of the crimes of that night, and drawing toward a demand for restitution and expiation. Hank Skinner was now in the full possession of his reason, with his memory unimpaired. He was able to connect past events with present. He now knew how he had come into possession of that mysterious ring. He now knew how to account for the fact that that body which floated ashore a week or two after his rescue, had tied about it a part of the same rope which had been bound about him. He knew that this was not one of those remarkable coincidences which sometimes happen, but a concurrent event in a series of crimes; and he thought further—he had seen Minnie but once, when he met her so strangely at the lonely grave of her father. In this circumstance, also this bringing of himself and the daughter of the plundered dead thus mysteriously together, he recognized another move of that unseen power of justice which was directing the hand of retribution. He recognized also the apparently magic wand which had brought to Emsley Merritt the sudden wealth which enabled him to leave his old homestead and remove to the city to live in grander style.

Hank's first resolution after these thoughts was to face the banker in the morning, and tax him with his crimes to his face, and demand instant restitution under a threat of exposure; but

it suddenly flashed upon his mind that Emsley Merritt had anticipated him in discovering Minnie's identity, and he thought he saw through the motive of her abduction, for he had now a clear recollection of the events preceding the second murderous attack upon himself, and he decided not to allow himself to be seen by the banker again until he had first seen Sleuth.

Thus it was that upon the following morning he took the first boat to New York. His first visit was to police head-quarters; from there he was referred to the detective department. At the latter place he was informed that Sleuth was a private detective, and was directed to the great detective's private office, with the added information that the party he was in search of was a very hard man to find, that his disguises were so numerous and so perfect that his own brother would not know him, and that, unless found at his office, he would have to depend upon a fortunate chance of meeting him, or otherwise leave a message, which would most probably be answered by Sleuth in person.

Hank had no difficulty in finding the office to which he was directed, but found it closed.

Observing a receptacle for letters, he entered an adjoining room, borrowed pen and paper, and wrote as follows:

"MR. SLEUTH,—I have found the man who pulled away in the boat. I have discovered more. After receiving this note, do not lose an instant, but come and see me at once, as I have a tale to unfold, etc.

"HANK SKINNER."

Hank inquired in the office where he was whether Sleuth had been seen lately, and was informed, that he had not been seen in his office for the last eight or ten days, but that such absences were a very common occurrence, and it was hard to tell at what moment he was likely to return.

Skinner was greatly disappointed, but having no other resource, he dropped the note into the letter-box and left.

It was long since he had been in New York, and he concluded while he was there to look about some. While passing through the street, an old play-bill upon a fence attracted his attention through a portion of a name he saw upon it. Minnie La— was all he could make out, but he recollected having heard the young lady whom he met addressed as Minnie, and subsequently introduced as Miss Minnie Lamont.

Hank was naturally shrewd, and he came to the conclusion that the orphan daughter of Charles Henry Decker had found it necessary to take an assumed name, and was most probably an actress or a danseuse. As our readers will recollect, at the very moment that Minnie was about furnishing her address to Skinner, she was interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Obitz, and, owing to the exciting events which followed, he had failed to obtain it. This had been a source of great disappointment, as he had not as yet learned her subsequent fate. Thus it was, that upon recognizing a portion of the name upon this old play bill, he determined to go to the theater and make inquiry concerning her. He had little difficulty in finding the place, and it being just about the time of rehearsal, there were quite a number of persons connected with the theater about. Addressing one of them, Hank inquired:

"Is Miss Minnie Lamont attached to this company?"

"She was," replied the man; "but she has mysteriously disappeared;" and then, after scanning Hank critically, and observing his peculiar appearance, he added: "but probably you have some information to give concerning her."

"It's just the other way," replied Hank; "I came to make inquiries concerning her."

"Are you a relative of hers?"

"No—only a friend; but I have some very important information for her, and it would be greatly to her advantage if I could see her."

"Well, old man, you can't be any more anxious to see her than several parties that I know. There is something very strange about the whole affair, and I heard our manager say, the other day, that if some decided steps were not taken shortly by parties more immediately interested, he should proceed in the matter himself."

After leaving the theater, prompted by curiosity, Hank thought he would go to Wall Street, and take a look at the exterior, if nothing more, of Emsley Merritt's private banking-house. He took his time going down, stopping to examine anything which might attract his attention,

which so used up the time that it was a little after three o'clock before he reached Wall Street. In front of the door he beheld a magnificent private coach, and at the same instant, recognized the pale features of the banker himself, propped up on the rear seat. Hank dodged into a hallway, and, from this point of observation, watched the movements of the man who had once attempted to murder him.

It was but a moment that he was gratified by the sight; a few seconds after first beholding him, he saw a youth come down the stoop of the bank, enter the carriage, when it immediately drove off. As it passed the point where Hank was concealed, he had one more glimpse of the banker's face, and unconsciously muttered, "the villain." As he spoke, he noticed a man standing near him, who evidently heard his smothered exclamation, and was eying him suspiciously. Hank thought that he had seen that face before, and also saw an expression upon the stranger's countenance which indicated recognition on the latter's part. On the impulse of the moment, he was about addressing this stranger, when the man turned suddenly upon his heel and walked rapidly away. The moment his back was turned, and Hank saw his gait, the truth flashed upon him that that man was one of the two men who accompanied the wicked woman who had been chiefly instrumental in procuring Miss Minnie Lamont's abduction, and was also one of the two men who had commenced the assault upon him the same night upon the beach, when he was so cruelly beaten.

### CHAPTER XXXIV.

"I MUST speak to that man," murmured Hank, and he walked rapidly after him, but the fellow had disappeared in the crowd. Still Hank hurried on in the direction whence he had last seen him, and on his way determined that if he should overtake the fellow, he would nail him at once, tax him with assisting in Minnie's abduction, and also with having committed a deadly assault upon himself.

At the corner of Broadway he again caught sight of the man. Starting into a brisk trot, he succeeded in overtaking him, and tapped him upon the shoulder. The man stopped, and turned so suddenly that Hank, who was not prepared for such a sudden halt, ran against him with such force as almost to bring him to the ground.

"What the devil do you mean?" cried the fellow, fiercely, "stopping people you don't know, and running them down in that way?"

"But I do know you," replied Hank, at the same time noticing that one or two curious persons, who had seen the collision, were gathering around and attracting others, he added, "I would like to have a few words with you in private, if you please."

"I have no business with you—I never saw you before," and raising his voice, he added, "you old rascal, you have selected the wrong man to come any of your sharp practices on."

"If you think, Wiseman, that I am a rascal, we will summon a policeman, and our conversation can take place before him. I have some questions to put to you, and if you fear to answer them in private, I am willing to accompany you to a station-house, and put my questions through the medium of a police captain."

Quite a crowd of curious people now surrounded the two men. Wiseman was startled. He knew that there were other crimes for which he might at any moment be denounced. There were many reasons why that name of Wiseman should not be bandied about, especially in that particular neighborhood. He saw at a glance that old Skinner was not to be bluffed off, and with the ready wit peculiar to him, he hit upon a plan for withdrawing without attracting attention, and he continued:

"You seem to be laboring under a mistake; I can readily set you right; if you will accompany me to my hotel, I will satisfy you of my identity."

Hank saw through this maneuver, and decided to favor it. This back down from his previous bravado was proof of his advantage. His idea was to extort from the fellow a confession of Minnie's whereabouts under the pressure of a threat to hand him over to the police, and he said:

"Very well, sir; I may be mistaken and will willingly accompany you to your hotel, when, if I find that I am wrong, I will make all reparation in my power," and they moved away together.



Nothing was said until they arrived opposite the Trinity Building, when Wiseman said:

"Suppose we cross here; my hotel is some distance up town, and I have some important business to transact before returning there. We can pass down this narrow street and escape observation. I don't like to be surrounded by crowds, and, if we had stayed where we were, in two minutes we would have had a crowd of five hundred people gathered."

By this time they had passed some yards down the narrow street indicated, when Wiseman turned suddenly and said:

"Well, now, what do you want?"

"You recognize me, don't you?" inquired Hank.

"I told you once that I didn't!"

"Well, if you're going to continue that game of denying your identity, there's but one thing for me to do!"

"What may that be?" said Wiseman, fiercely.

"Summon the police and hand you into custody."

Wiseman's face now became perfectly livid; his eyes glittered with a dangerous light; his lips twitched nervously, and in the excess of his rage, he actually grated his teeth as he said, in a low, hoarse tone:

"Well, suppose I admit that you are right—that I am Charley Wiseman—what then?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said Hank, not at all frightened or disconcerted by the fellow's threatening tone and attitude. "I want you to tell me just exactly where Miss Lamont is concealed. If you do, as far as I am concerned, you can go free from the assault committed upon me and for other crimes for which you are wanted. If you don't, I shall hand you over to the police, assure you of her murder, compel you to produce her to save yourself from the gallows, and then take your chances for what other little affairs the authorities may want you!"

"Is that all?" said Wiseman; and at the same moment, with the quickness and power of a practiced pugilist, he dealt Hank a powerful blow in the face, which knocked him to the ground with terrible force.

By the time Skinner recovered from the shock and astonishment of this powerful and cowardly blow, the villain had disappeared. Nobody had happened to see the blow struck, and Wiseman succeeded in making his escape.

Hank's discomfiture convinced him that it required more experienced and wary men than himself to compete with such shrewd and desperate criminals as Wiseman.

When Wiseman requested Skinner to accompany him to his hotel, he had undoubtedly determined upon some such bold stroke as this to extricate himself from Skinner's clutches. Hank walked all the way from the Trinity Building to the South Ferry, with his bleeding face, without meeting one person who had sufficient interest to ask him how he had been injured. As he passed along, the people stopped and stared at him, and in his hearing expressed to one another their surmises as to how he had got hurt. Some remarked that the old fellow must have been bucking a tiger, got beat, and was thrown out. Others, that the old bum had been drinking bad whisky, and a curb-stone had flown up and hit him.

Near the ferry, Hank entered a saloon where he was slightly acquainted, and, washing himself off, succeeded in stanching the blood; and half an hour later, when he walked upon the ferry-boat, he exhibited no further effect of the desperate blow he had received than a slight abrasion across the cheek, and the incipient swelling which precedes a discolored eye. It was shortly after six o'clock when he arrived at the tavern.

Upon entering the bar-room, the landlord exclaimed:

"Halloo! old man; you've been having another tussle, have you? Why, what's the matter? Somebody seems to be 'putting up a job' for you all the time."

"Yes," remarked Hank, quietly, "I seem to have been getting the worst of it awhile back, but I guess my time will come."

"Where have you been all day?"

"I've been down to the city."

"Why, I thought you must have been somewhere. Your friend, Crosby, was here all the afternoon waiting for you; he didn't want to show much anxiety to see you, but I thought all the while he wanted to see you pretty bad."

"Did he leave any message?" inquired Hank.

"Not a word; but he jumped all questions; he's an odd fellow, that. Did you know him before you got hurt?"

"No; but it's strange he didn't leave some word. He's the very man I've been to New York to see!"

"Been to New York to see him?" said the landlord, abruptly. "Why, I thought he belonged over here on the Ridge. From what little he said to-day he threw out that idea."

"Yes, he belongs to the Ridge, but I had an appointment with him in the city," replied Hank, recognizing at once that he had let out a different impression of Crosby's home than the latter wished.

During his conversation the tavern-keeper had stood behind the bar; upon Hank's refusing his invitation to have a drink, he came out, and taking a seat beside him, reached over and said, in a low, confidential tone:

"Say, Hank, I've always been a friend of yours—let a fellow in on this 'lay,' won't you?"

"What lay?" asked Hank, innocently.

"You can't deceive me, Hank; I tell you there's something going on. I've had my eyes and ears open, and I've picked up enough just to make mischief if I 'sneak,' but I've got no such idea if you show up."

"If you have dropped on anything out of the way, you have done more than I have. What have you picked up?"

"I don't believe this man, who calls himself Zeb Crosby, ever saw the Ridge only from this side of the bay. I thought so before I dropped on him the first night he brought you here, and you let the cat out of the bag yourself, when you said that you'd been to New York to see him."

"There's nothing suspicious about that, is there? He might live at the Ridge, and we might have business in New York, and make an appointment to meet there."

"Well, admitting that he lives at the Ridge, he's got business over here, and it isn't no ordinary business either; and if you don't see fit to let me into the rake, I'm going to bark and bring a crowd of other dogs around. This man, Crosby, was sitting on the stoop here, and said he would wait until you came back; but when this chap went by in a buggy, who made those mysterious visits to the old banker while he was sick here, old Crosby gave a jump as if somebody had pronged him with a pitchfork, and with a face as pale as a frightened woman, he started after him. Now, you see, I'm good at putting things together; this attack on you down on the beach—those screams heard up in the woods—finding of that pistol—the fresh drops of blood—the tumbling of the banker down the cliff—and something stranger than that, the old banker got frightened last night, and when we rushed into his room he murmured something about 'Hank Skinner,' 'ghost,' and 'graves,' and all that. And then to-day this Zeb Crosby comes here looking for you while you are in New York looking for him, and while waiting for you, to top all, he sees this fellow who was visiting old Merritt, gets excited, shows that he recognizes him, and rushes after him. All these strange circumstances, these attempted murders, and, for all I know, actual murders, are all links of one chain!"

"You reason well," said Hank; "and you have drawn things down very fine, and have laid out the ground-work for a sensation novel; but all you have been saying is a mixed riddle to me."

"All right," said the landlord; "I see you've got your instructions, and you are going to abide by them; but if you take my advice you will just repeat what I have said to you to these 'nobs' who are using you; and there is one more thing you can tell if they don't come down, I will do just what I said I would. I'll go and tell what little information I have picked up to those who will have no interest in 'rattling' this thing out."

As the landlord rose from his seat after having fired his last shot, Zeb Crosby entered the door. He sauntered in deliberately, and upon recognizing Hank, said, in a friendly, but otherwise indifferent manner:

"Well, my friend, I see you have got around all right."

"Yes," answered Hank; "thanks to good nursing procured by your kind offices, I find myself able to stir out again."

Crosby had taken a seat beside Hank, and the two men now engaged in a low conversation. The bar-room was filled with a crowd of people, and, although the landlord attended to his business, he did not take his eyes off of the two men,

nor fail to keep his ears open to catch any little chance word that he might overhear.

At this moment the supper-bell rang, and Hank and his companion passed in to supper. Immediately after they retired to Hank's room, and after closing the door, all the assumed indifference of Crosby vanished, and he said, with great eagerness:

"Come now, my man, you hinted that you had made wonderful discoveries since I saw you last."

"I have made wonderful discoveries, and never before in my life was I more convinced of the truth of the old adage, 'Murder will out' than I am at this moment."

"Well, come, come," said Crosby, impatiently; "what have you discovered?"

"In the first place," replied Hank, "I have discovered a return of all my original faculties. I have a clear recollection of events up to the time when Emsley Merritt—" Crosby started, but did not interrupt him—"tied the balance of the tiller-rope about my body, and with a heavy stone fastened to it, threw me over into the dark waters of the bay while still alive and conscious."

"Go on, go on," said Crosby, in low, excited tones; "tell me all, tell me everything."

And Hank did so from the very beginning. He detailed his previous knowledge of Emsley Merritt; the fact of his having known of his leaving the gambling-table at the little tavern on the Bay Ridge Beach dead broke; of his subsequently detecting Emsley Merritt in the act of robbing the dead body of Decker; of their bargain to divide the spoils; the dispute and its result, and also of his having first seen the banker while sitting upon the stoop; his visit to his room, and all the other facts up to the moment of his present meeting with Crosby.

During the narration, Crosby was greatly excited. Upon its conclusion, for some moments he sat perfectly silent, evidently revolving the facts of the terrible tale in his mind. At length he said:

"Then this man, after all, is not really the murderer of Minnie's father?"

"No," said Hank, "he is not; no doubt but they met for the first time—the living and the dead—when the unconscious form floated beside his boat."

"The fact of the body having so much money and jewelry upon it would tend to indicate that Minnie's father was not murdered at all, but must have been accidentally drowned."

"That is my opinion," said Hank.

"Do you think that Merritt ever had the least idea that you escaped?"

"I do not."

"It's strange, then, that he should have been in such a terror of discovery. Had you not been rescued and lived to relate these facts, sufficient evidence could never have been gathered against him to secure even his arrest. Supposing you forever silenced, I am surprised that a man of his native keenness would ever have attempted to pursue this man's daughter in the manner in which he has. It only goes to prove how a man's guilty fears will magnify the chances against him. Do you think that the banker saw you, and is now aware that you are in the land of the living?"

"I do not; I think that when he saw me in his room last night, he looked upon me as one fresh from the cold damp of the tomb."

"Then," said Sleuth, "I think that our labors in behalf of Minnie are approaching the end. Merritt must not see you, or get the least inkling that you are still alive; and I am now prepared to compel him to disgorge every dollar, with interest, that was stolen from the dead form of that poor girl's father."

"But," inquired Hank, "what has become of the girl? that is the question which agitates me. I fear that that old rascal and intended murderer has really made away with her."

"I do not fear that, nor have I anticipated any such result from the first. He would not dare to do that, although he would dare about as much, in an underhand way, as any scoundrel I ever met. I think that he has only, through some of his hired instruments, got Minnie secreted somewhere until he can successfully carry out an ultimate design. To a certain extent, I believe that he thinks he has carried out a part of his desperate purpose; he knows that there would be no safety for him while I am living; he fears me more than her. His design has been to get me out of the way, and at present, he is congratulating himself that he succeeded."



CHAPTER XXXV.

"What do you mean?" cried Hank. "Has he attempted to murder you also?"

"He tried to have me murdered, and believes he succeeded. On the same night that he fell over the cliff, I shadowed him from New York. We came down on the boat together. My idea was, that by watching his movements I was taking the most direct means for discovering Miss Lamont's place of concealment. I had special reasons bearing upon an ultimate result why I wished to keep all the facts connected with her disappearance secret as long as possible. Probably I erred in not making charges against him and having him arrested at once. I hope not; and at present, I think that so far I have acted for the best. Upon the night when I followed him down to the boat, I was satisfied that he was about visiting the place where Minnie was secreted. I intercepted a note which had been delivered to him, couched in ambiguous and startling terms. On the face of it it read as if murder had really been committed, and of course Minnie would have been the victim. Upon first reading the note, I concluded that such was the case, and feared that the poor, dear girl had been sacrificed. Subsequent turning over of the matter in my mind connected with certain facts which I had gained, and aided by long experience, convinced me that this note was not of such deadly import as appeared upon its face; yet there was sufficient to indicate that a rendezvous had been appointed. Not until our arrival at the landing did I become aware that I had been recognized on the boat; but it seems that I was. This was an unfortunate circumstance; had I escaped being discovered and arrived on the boat without his knowledge, I should have known Minnie's whereabouts that night; but he had seen me, as it subsequently proved. There was a man met him on the wharf by appointment. That man, I know—that man I hope yet to live to bring to the gallows. Circumstances favored them. I was thrown into the water. They supposed I was drowned. The tide was strong, and I was carried out some distance from the dock before I recovered from the shock. The night was exceedingly dark. I was disabled in one arm, and owing to the incumbrance of my clothes, and the strength of the tide, I was having a hard buffet of it, and probably, under the circumstances, would have drowned, had not I at that moment beheld the outlines of a small vessel coming through the darkness. I hailed those on the boat, and fortunately they heard me; but by the time they could lower a boat and get me aboard I had sunk into unconsciousness. When I recovered, we were far out to sea. I had been picked up by a pilot boat. I should have paid them any price to have brought me back, and landed me at the island; but I was assured that they would return anyhow before the following noon. But in the morning I discovered that fever had set in, and at the same time, the captain of the pilot boat informed me that, owing to the turn the wind had taken, it would probably be a day or two before he would return. I had not disclosed my identity, and I knew that my present condition would preclude my doing anything for some days, so I had nothing to say. Four days ago I was landed at Fort Hamilton, but I was still in too weak a state to do anything, so I remained there quietly till this morning, when I secured a boat, and came over here."

"And you have come just in time," said Hank. And he then disclosed the conversation he had had with the keeper of the tavern.

"What he says or threatens," remarked Crosby, "is a matter of but little importance. I know him of old. I can whisper a word or two in his ear which will make him as quiet and tractable as a lamb."

"Well, now, what is our next move?" inquired Hank. "I understand that you saw and recognized Wiseman this afternoon."

"Yes, and what is worse, I fear that the scoundrel saw and recognized me before I saw him; as soon as I recognized him, I started in pursuit, but, the villain whipped his horse up and distanced me. But since what you have told me, it makes but little difference; I can deal successfully now with the man that pays him; to-morrow I will see Merritt."

"I doubt whether you will be able to, owing to his condition."

"I will find a way to see him." And the two men separated for the night.

EMSLEY MERRITT reclined upon an elegant couch in one of the upper rooms of his costly mansion. Returning health, and the gorgeous surroundings of his palatial dwelling had brought back the banker's pride and love of wealth and power. He had entirely recovered from the effects also of the fright occasioned by the supposed appearance of the phantom of Hank Skinner.

Emsley Merritt was a cold-hearted and ordinarily strong nerved man. He now felt that all the active parties who had any suspicion of his former crime had been thrust from his path. He certainly felt a twinge and a cold chill pass over his body when a recollection of how they had been removed flashed across his mind. He sophistically argued with himself that he was not responsible for either the death of Sleuth or Minnie. He consoled himself with the self-satisfying belief that the former had perished while pursuing him, in a way and manner for which he was not responsible; and that the latter had died a natural death, the result of an accident, for which no one was to blame. Had not Mr. Merritt willingly deceived himself, he would not have been satisfied with either of these conclusions. A moment's candid meditation would have instructed him that the death of both Sleuth and Minnie was as directly attributable to him as the final deliberate, as far as he was concerned, murder, of Hank Skinner.

But wealth in itself hardened the heart, and long years of practice in finding excuses for his many wicked acts, had molded Emsley Merritt's conscience into a willing instrument of his vanity and self-exoneration. At no time since his first suspicion that either Sleuth or Minnie had any intimation of his guilt, had he felt so self-complacent and secure as he did at this moment. Of course the thought thrust itself upon his mind, "Am I not in the power of this woman Obitz and Wiseman?" but he put away this fear with the assurance that neither of them would be actuated by motives of vengeance. Their silence could be purchased; and with that concealed self-assurance of those who had lived a life of selfishness, he thought not of his own death and a day of final judgment, but argued rather, that the lives of criminals were short, and that a violent death at any moment might relieve him of any dread of exposure from these two persons.

The banker's thoughts were pleasant and hopeful. During his long business career, he had amassed an immense fortune. He had long contemplated removing his whole family to Europe, and for the last few months had been settling up his business with an intention of final retirement. The events of the last few weeks had decided him to put this long-contemplated plan into immediate execution. "Yes," he soliloquized, "in less than two weeks I shall be beyond the grasp of Wiseman and Mrs. Obitz. As long as that infernal Sleuth lived there would have been no safety for me; but now; ha, ha; now," he repeated, "if he 'shadows' me, it must be a veritable phantom, and apparitions may annoy and terrify, but they can not give evidence!"

At this moment there came a rap at the door.

"Come in," cried the self-elated man, cheerfully.

A waiter entered.

"Well, what is it, John?" cried Mr. Merritt.

"There is a gentleman in the parlor, sir, as wishes to see you."

Mr. Merritt turned a trifle paler than usual, as he muttered:

"I suppose it is that infernal Wiseman, but I will soon put the Atlantic Ocean between myself and that fellow's importunities. Go down again, John," said he addressing the servant, "and tell the gentleman that I am a little worse to day, and unable to see any one no matter how important his business. You may say that Mr. Merritt told you that at present his health was of more importance than anything else, but that if he will be kind enough to leave his name, and will call again in a few days, I will be most happy to receive him. And John," added the banker, "you may look at him pretty sharp, in case he refuses to give his name, and tell me what kind of a looking man he is."

In a few minutes John returned, and said that the gentleman still refused to give his name, but wanted Mr. Merritt to set some special day and hour, when he could be seen without fail, as the business was of more importance to others than Mr. Merritt, and that he must see him at once.

"What kind of a looking man is he, John?" inquired Mr. Merritt.

"He is an oldish-looking man, sir, but very much of a gentleman, I should think," replied the servant.

"Well, John, you may go and tell him that it is impossible for me to set a time, as I am not the arbiter of my own health; you may tell him that if he will communicate his business, I will give it all the attention I can."

The servant was gone some time, and when he returned, he handed the banker a note evidently hastily written. Mr. Merritt opened the missive, and with a livid countenance and trembling hands read as follows:

"MR. MERRITT,—Sir:—My business is in relation to the disappearance of one Hank Skinner, whose whereabouts has been a mystery for about sixteen years. Recent facts have been developed which lead his friends to think that you can furnish some clew concerning his fate. By this you will understand the necessity of an immediate interview; certainly not later than to-morrow. I await your appointment."

"Respectfully, —"

For full five minutes after reading this portentous note, Mr. Merritt did not utter one word, but glanced vacantly at the ominous epistle, which he nervously clutched in his grasp. At length he said:

"John, tell that man I will meet him in my office to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock, without fail, and will then hear an explanation of this note, which is to me at present an enigma."

John departed and delivered the message, word for word, as directed.

"Very well," said the stranger; "you may tell your master that I will be there." And without further words, the "oldish-looking gentleman," as John termed him, took his departure.

Mr. Merritt drove down town on the following day to meet his appointment. On entering his private office, he beheld young Emsley seated with his face toward the door, conversing with a stranger, who sat with his back toward the entrance. When his father came in, young Merritt arose, with an exclamation of surprise. The gentleman he was conversing with also arose and faced about, when, with a cry that verged on to a yell, Mr. Merritt exclaimed, as he staggered toward a seat:

"Great heaven! Sleuth!"

"Yes, sir," said Sleuth, quietly. "I promised you, Mr. Merritt, at our last interview, that I would see you again, and have a more direct and satisfactory conversation with you. I am here for that purpose to-day."

"Well, what is your business with me?"

"My business is of very great importance to you. If you desire it, our conversation shall take place before witnesses, otherwise they can withdraw."

"I would prefer that we have no witnesses."

Sleuth then turned to the younger Merritt and said:

"You have heard your father's request?"

When left alone, Sleuth turned the key in the door, and drawing a chair, so as to face Mr. Merritt, said:

"Now we will begin; the mask must be dropped; the least attempt at evasion or denial, or intimation of a desire to avoid performing exact justice, will fail; the time or opportunity for further deceit is past; are you ready to hear my statement?"

Mr. Merritt's reply was—"I am; proceed."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"I HAVE a story to tell you," and as Sleuth spoke, he moved his chair toward a desk, and taking from his pocket a pistol, he deliberately cocked it, and placed it upon the desk within his reach. His movements were deliberate, and his manner significant and resolute. "This is not intended as a menace," he said, "but merely to indicate that I mean business, and to guard against any sudden onslaught. As I said before, I have a story to tell, and I don't want you to say one word, or to interrupt me until I have finished every detail. I have proofs for every fact I am about to allege. Something more than sixteen years ago, a young man, at that time a clerk in the banking-house of H. L. & Co., became addicted to gambling. On the nineteenth of June, in the year 18—, this young man spent the greater portion of the night gambling at a little tavern situated near the beach in the vi-



city of Bay Ridge. Some two hours after midnight, he arose from the table dead broke. When this young man left that table, he went down to the beach, intending to enter his boat and row to his home on the opposite shore. As he took his oars in his hand and attempted to shove his boat off, a floating obstacle thumped against the stern. With an oath, this young man sheered his boat to one side, when, by the dim light of the moon, he beheld the body of a dead man floating beside his boat. What the first intentions of that young man were, I know not, nor what his object was, when he took his oar and forced the ghastly object upon the beach." Another and deeper groan of anguish issued from the purple lips of the banker. Still Sleuth proceeded. "This young man, this broken young gambler turned the body over upon the beach, and there beheld shining upon the drenched shirt-bosom a costly diamond pin. We judge," and as Sleuth said this, he cast upon the trembling banker a peculiar, but penetrating look, "that the sight of this costly gem held forth to this young man the first inducement to crime. Whether that was so or not, we know that at any rate that pin was wrenched from that dead body and transferred to the pocket of the young gambler. While removing the pin, this robber of the dead discovered also a heavy, curiously wrought chain, which encircled the neck of the corpse. This, also, the guilty robber transferred to his own pocket. At this moment the robber was startled by a noise. Taking from his pocket a pistol, he cocked it, and proceeded cautiously along the beach to discover from whence the noise had come. He had gone but a short distance, when he beheld a man crouching behind a rock. A few moments' conversation revealed the fact that this man, Hank Skinner, a man of doubtful character, had been watching all his previous movements. After several moments' conversation and attempted evasion on the part of the gambler, a compact was entered into between these two heartless men, to continue jointly this robbery of the dead. The body was secured by a rope, sunk beneath the surface of the water, and so drawn two thirds of the distance across the bay, when it was raised to the surface, and the original robber resumed his guilty work. A large sum of money and numerous checks were taken from the drenched clothes of the dead; and now a dispute arose between the two robbers over a division of the spoils, and resulted in one of them being thrown overboard. The money taken from the body of this dead man was readily available, the checks had to be converted into money. The robber was a bank clerk, well acquainted with all the forms of banking. He assumed a disguise, forged a letter purporting to have been written by the well-known firm with whom he was engaged, addressed to the officers of the bank on whom these checks were drawn, introducing the disguised scoundrel as Charles Henry Decker, the individual in whose favor they were made. With this ill-gotten wealth, the guilty man now launched forth as a speculator on his own account, and in a few years amassed a colossal fortune. Some time ago, by accident, he came in contact with a poor orphan girl struggling to earn her living. This young lady was at one time an inmate of his house, from whence she was driven in disgrace for no crime. Subsequent discoveries made known the fact to this man that this helpless orphan, who had been driven ignominiously from his door, was the child and only heir of the dead man from whose body he had obtained the nucleus, through robbery, of his great wealth. And now comes the blackest chapter in this guilty record. That man hired two unscrupulous wretches to abduct this helpless girl. It is not necessary for me to detail further this man's crimes. Emsley Merritt," and Sleuth's voice was raised, and his eyes gleamed fiercely, as he said, "what have you to say? What reparation have you to offer? What expiation will you make?"

"Alas! none," answered the abject man, "would that I could, but it is too late."

"Too late! Why too late? can not you restore the fortune to the child which you stole from the dead body of the father?"

"Would that I could; but it is too late—too late. Oh, my God! how is this to end?"

"Where is Miss Lamont?"

"I employed a woman known as Mrs. Obitz to abduct her. My only object was to get her out of the city and, by either persuasion or force, compel her to marry my son. But the woman whom I engaged proved false to me. Her object, I surmise, was to keep Minnie in

her power, and so hold her as a constant goad to extort money from me."

"As you are a living man, and hope for forgiveness for your many crimes, are you telling the truth? Have you no more positive grounds for believing that Miss Lamont is dead?"

"I have not. I only surmised that these people might destroy her to prevent the possibility of her ultimate escape, so that they may safely hold their presumed power over me."

Sleuth sat for some time thinking. The words of the banker had aroused dreadful apprehensions in his mind. Suddenly he bethought himself of the note which Wiseman had given to the banker, and which he had subsequently obtained. Taking it from his pocket-book he handed it to Mr. Merritt, with the inquiry:

"What is the meaning of this?"

Upon beholding this note, which he had lost so mysteriously, the banker gazed upon Sleuth, in spite of the terror of the moment, with a look of perfect wonder. He was completely astounded, and shuddered as he realized the mysterious power of the wonderful man upon whom he was gazing. He read the note, and as he did so, his ready wit seized upon this very missive as a means to prove the truth of his former assertions, and he said:

"I know you will believe me; a man of your wonderful shrewdness will perceive at once that in this explanation I am about to offer I am telling the truth. I had reason to believe that these people had, during a squabble among themselves, or to quiet her struggles to escape, made away with Miss Lamont. I gave them so to understand, and refused to pay the sum I promised for her abduction and detent on, until I was assured that she was alive and well. A curious freak induced Mrs. Obitz to write this note, which is intended as a satire upon what she intended to imply were my ridiculous fears, and the note is written as you see it."

The conversation between Sleuth and the banker now took an entirely different turn. Young Emsley Merritt was summoned into the private office and instructed to dismiss the mystified and puzzled clerks of the institution. After the closing of the bank, when all had left the building with the exception of young Emsley and the officer, who occupied the outer office, and Sleuth and the banker, who still remained in the inner office, the latter said:

"How much do you claim as her portion?"

"How much did you realize from the booty stole from the floating corpse?"

"Less than fifteen thousand dollars," was the answer.

"How much money did you have of your own when this sum came into your possession?"

The banker hesitated; but after a moment said, frankly:

"None."

"Then the fact is, this orphan supplied the capital and you the brains: she was an involuntary silent partner, legally entitled to one half, having furnished all the capital of every dollar realized therefrom. But I only claim for her one third of all you possess."

"I am willing," said the banker, to restore the fifteen thousand dollars, with interest, for the whole time since I have had the use of it. I think that would be fair."

"I have claimed, on behalf of this orphan, one third, for her share, of all the profits which have been realized from the capital; if you exhibit the least reluctance to perform so small an act of justice, so easy an expiation, I shall claim for her one half of all you possess, and collect every dollar of it, and hang you then."

"Be careful," said the banker, for the first time speaking with any show of his old spirit of defiance, "be careful," he repeated, "that you do not drive me to the wall. I don't know but what you intend to hang me, anyhow, even after you get all the money that you exact. I have suffered a great deal at your hands, Mr. Sleuth, and after all it might prove more satisfactory to me to hang, and baffle you."

"As you choose," said Sleuth; "I have nothing to do with any crime you have committed, beyond those which affect the interests of my protégée. When you have satisfied my claim in her behalf, we are silent; you have nothing further to fear or dread. If a common sense of justice does not animate you, you ought to be shrewd enough to know that it is the interest of yourself and family to accede to my very moderate demands."

The banker saw that it was useless to attempt any further dalliance, and he surrendered at discretion. It was now drawing toward evening;

the four men together visited a neighboring restaurant and procured refreshment. They then returned to the bank where they remained busily engaged until the following morning. Shortly before the usual hour for commencing business Sleuth emerged from the granite banking house of the great banker. A pleased and gratified smile irradiated his countenance; and well it might, in testimony of his success thus far. Sleuth, the great detective and the orphan's friend, had secured, and bore with him as he left that bank, from the sordid, hard-fisted old banker, for the orphan of Charles Henry Decker, her full share of the profits of the great banking-house, and he had in his possession, in trust for Minnie Lamont, deeds and bonds sufficient to make her a millionaire.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

As related, it was early in the morning when Sleuth left Emsley Merritt's banking-house with Minnie Lamont's recovered fortune in his possession.

Sleuth had spent the hours of that night industriously, had figured up and exacted the orphan's full share. Although possessing a frame of iron, his recent illness and subsequent herculean labors told upon him, and he felt that he needed rest.

Before parting with the detective, Emsley Merritt, the dejected banker, after having made restitution, had inquired how the former had obtained possession of the facts of the robbery of the body of Decker, and all the other incidents of that long hidden Bay Ridge mystery. Mr. Merritt had ceased making any further denial; he knew that he was at the mercy of Sleuth, and nannay admitted everything. When he made the inquiry, Sleuth replied:

"If you have a remnant of conscience remaining, I have pleasant news to impart to you. Hank Skinner, your intended victim, is alive and well to-day."

"Would to God," exclaimed the banker, "I had known this sooner."

"And then," said Sleuth, "you would have clung on to the orphan's fortune."

"No, no," replied the banker. "I was not fighting to save the money. I would willingly have compromised that matter long ago. I feared exposure and punishment. Although I am innocent of the death of Decker, circumstances pointed to me as his murderer."

"Mr. Merritt," said Sleuth, "I have no sympathy for you; I have an instinctive hatred for crime of any description. I know that there is a fact which you still hold in reserve. You have restored the fortune, but not the owner of it; you can save me a great deal of trouble and anxiety by putting me on the track of the whereabouts of that poor wronged girl."

"Would to Heaven that I could, but I can not."

"Answer me one question. Had the scoundrel Wiseman any hand in her abduction?"

"He had."

"Then you must know something of her whereabouts."

"It is likely that he does." And the two men parted.

When Sleuth reached the hotel where he had left Skinner, he informed him partially of what had transpired. He then stated that it was necessary that he should take an hour or two's rest, but directed that he should be called at precisely eleven o'clock.

That same afternoon Sleuth and Skinner took the one o'clock boat to Staten Island, having previously deposited the funds which he had recovered from Merritt in a regular banking institution.

When Skinner and Sleuth landed, they did not go up into the village, but struck a course along the beach until they arrived at the path leading over the bluff to the château. This path they followed until they arrived in the vicinity of the old house, when they concealed themselves from sight on a little knoll where they could command a view of the house and its surroundings. They had been there for three hours without observing indications of any persons being thereabouts.

They finally concluded to enter the château, and were delighted to find both Minnie and Mrs. Obitz.

On their entering, the latter exclaimed:

"Thank God! thank God, we are saved!"

Wiseman was also found in the same place, apparently holding the two women as prisoners. It took but a few moments to have the handcuffs



put upon him. Then, after spending some time in mutual congratulations, they all left for New York.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"I THINK, Minnie, you draw an entirely wrong inference from Sleuth's silence."

"You are hopeful," replied Minnie, "while I am matter-of-fact. Sleuth thoroughly understood the relations which existed between Harry and me; his failure to make any allusion to Harry is prompted by a reluctance to impart disastrous news. I never expect to see Harry again."

"Then why don't you ask Sleuth directly, and put an end to suspense? If your conclusions are correct, it is evident that Sleuth will not make any disclosure until you seek it."

This conversation occurred between Mrs. Obitz and Minnie at the house of Mrs. Grey, the day following the rescue by Sleuth. The opportune appearance of the detective, and the arrest of Wiseman, resulted in a complete change in their original plans. Upon Sleuth's suggestion, coupled with an assurance of their perfect safety, they had taken up their abode at Minnie's former quarters. After placing his prisoner in custody Sleuth had called upon them that same evening, but had made no allusion to Harry Loveland.

Upon the following morning he had spent an hour with them, and still maintained his reticence concerning Harry. After his departure the conversation recorded in the opening paragraphs took place between Minnie and Mrs. Obitz.

Again, later in the afternoon, the conversation was resumed.

Mrs. Obitz remarked:

"If you do not wish to introduce the subject, Minnie, I will seek an explanation from Sleuth myself; he certainly can have no reason for maintaining his silence toward me."

Sleuth did not call again upon them until the succeeding evening, when, according to a previous arrangement, Mrs. Obitz met him alone, and after the usual greetings she abruptly introduced the subject by inquiring:

"Have you seen Mr. Harry Loveland recently?"

"Do you ask this question for your own satisfaction, or are you prompted to do so by Miss Lamont?"

Mrs. Obitz was confused, and for the first time felt a foreshadowing of a coming unhappy disclosure, she had observed the sudden change which came over the countenance of her companion when she put her abrupt question, and she answered:

"It matters little upon whose suggestion I make the inquiry. I do not know," and a slight flush suffused her face as she spoke, "whether you are aware of the change which has come over my aims and purposes in life, nor of the tender and unqualified friendship existing between Minnie and myself."

Sleuth interrupted her by asserting promptly: "I do; the first opportunity Minnie had she improved by explaining to me fully the value and loyalty of your services, and my question was not intended to suggest the idea that I would not treat you as her friend."

"Then, as her friend, and on her behalf, I seek this explanation; and further, I will add, at her request."

"Well," replied Sleuth, "in good time I will answer your inquiry; at present there are more important interests of Miss Lamont's to be settled than the whereabouts of this young gentleman, Loveland."

"There you are mistaken," said Mrs. Obitz. "I am addressing you, Mr. Sleuth, as a warm and valued friend of Minnie's, one who has earned confidence on my behalf. Minnie is not a demonstrative person—still waters run deep—but there is a sorrow crowding at her heart which is eating her life away. I suppose that you are aware of the relations which existed between these two young people. Minnie would never disclose her inward suffering, even though dying, and I tell you frankly I have watched her when she was unconscious of my surveillance. If Harry Loveland has proved unfaithful her life will be upon his hands; she will not survive the knowledge of his faithlessness."

During these remarks the changing emotions depicted upon Sleuth's face were various. His calm, black eye glittered with an enhanced animation, and when he spoke his tones were so different, so full, rich, and tender, and his manner so earnest, compared with his ordinary

quick utterance and brusque gesture, that Mrs. Obitz was astonished, and a strange suspicion flashed over her mind when he said:

"Are Miss Lamont's feelings so deeply interested?" And his tones became exceedingly tender, as he added: "Does she believe him faithless?"

"Why this circumlocution?" said Mrs. Obitz, curtly. "Why these explanations in advance? If Harry Loveland is alive and well, why does he not come and put these questions himself—put them to her who has the only right to answer them? If Harry Loveland is dead, or what is worse, if you know that he has proven faithless, what need is there of them? I ask you directly, is Harry alive and well?"

"I can not answer your questions," replied Sleuth. "I wish first to have a long talk with Minnie upon other matters. I have had on hand business for her; I have been wonderfully successful. Business first—love afterward."

These last remarks of Sleuth were spoken in his usual curt and brusque manner. For a moment both were silent. Mrs. Obitz was a keen, observant woman—a woman who had had great experience in studying human character. The strange suspicion previously alluded to as having flashed across her mind became stronger, and assumed more tangible proportions.

"This old man," she thought to herself, "has become fascinated; his old heart has been stirred by love; he is playing false. Though faithful to Minnie in all other matters he is now selfishly determined to use the influence of his great services to supplant Harry, and take this young and beautiful creature to his old heart as a reward for what he has done for her."

At length Sleuth broke the silence and said:

"I mean no disrespect to you, Mrs. Obitz, nor do I doubt your loyalty or worthiness, but I prefer not to answer any questions upon this subject or make any explanations only to Minnie herself."

"You blinded, old, love-sick, nobody!" thought Mrs. Obitz to herself. "I am convinced now that I am right, but I'll block your game before you have an opportunity to play your first card." And when Sleuth requested to see Minnie she said:

"Minnie is not at home."

This was not the truth. The object in uttering this falsehood was for the purpose of posting Minnie in regard to this last singular development, so as to prepare her to properly check this keen, resolute, noble, loyal man, whom love had made foolish, and to whom she was under such deep obligations.

Sleuth eyed her keenly. The nervous manner in which she made this last reply revealed to his keen senses at once that it was a falsehood. He was perplexed and annoyed; his perplexity and annoyance showed plainly on his countenance. He knew of no reason why an interview with Minnie should be denied to him; but he thought it prudent to keep his doubts of Mrs. Obitz's veracity to himself. Upon taking his departure he said:

"I will call this evening. I must see her positively; it is to her interest and mine."

When Mrs. Obitz rejoined Minnie, after this interview, had not the sad face of the latter checked her merriment, she would have laughed outright. Minnie sat and gazed at her for a moment without speaking, but the agony of her suspense was plainly depicted upon her countenance. Mrs. Obitz's first remark was one of reassurance and hopefulness, but based upon her own conclusions. She was satisfied that she had divined the reason of Sleuth's silence concerning Harry Loveland, and she said:

"Minnie, darling, I have both good and funny news to impart; instead of having to mourn a dead lover, you have got two living ones."

"Is Harry alive and well?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Obitz, without an instant's hesitation, on the strength of her supposed discovery; "he is not only alive but faithful, and loves you as dearly as ever. That's the good news."

Minnie's face became perfectly radiant as Mrs. Obitz continued:

"And now comes the funny part of it. Old Sleuth, the detective, loves you, too. That truly noble and loyal man has been made foolish by a strange passion for you, which the old love-sick fool failed to conceal; the *dénouement* will be that he is at the bottom of Harry's apparent lack of interest in your fate. After you have received a proposal from old Sleuth, who will base his claim for acceptance on his great services, the truth will come out."

The joyous expression which momentarily illuminated Minnie's face was suddenly succeeded by a look of pain, as she exclaimed:

"It can't be possible. Sleuth is not a man, in the first place, to be liable to such a sentiment; and secondly, is too noble to wish to take advantage of a series of obligations. My faith in Sleuth is implicit."

"So is mine," replied Mrs. Obitz; "but wiser men than Sleuth have been made foolish by love."

"For once you are mistaken."

"To-night will decide it," replied Mrs. Obitz, significantly.

That evening when Sleuth called, in accordance with a previous promise, Mrs. Obitz remained in the room during the interview. Sleuth appeared ill at ease, and betrayed a nervousness totally foreign to his usual resolute bearing. Even Minnie was compelled to admit to herself that he was unlike the Sleuth she had learned to revere. Suddenly Sleuth turned toward Minnie, and said, abruptly:

"I might as well out with it at once—"

At that moment Mrs. Obitz caught Minnie's eye, and nodded as though to imply now its coming. After giving utterance to the exclamation noted, Sleuth continued:

"Miss Lamont, when I was first introduced to you as a detective, certain business was placed in my hands. That business, as far as I am concerned, has been successfully carried out. It pains me to revive a recollection of your father's tragic death; still I have this consolation to offer. I do not believe that your father was murdered."

Minnie turned pale. She was all attention. While Sleuth proceeded in the earnestness of his narration he seemed to have forgotten to preserve his usual austerity.

"How your father met his death will always remain a mystery; but that he was not murdered I have unquestioned proof. From the moment when his body floated ashore at Bay Ridge I have been able to solve the mystery. Your father's body was found upon the night of the third day succeeding his disappearance. His body was washed upon the beach at Bay Ridge. A young man, who was a gambler and defaulter, found the body, discovered that it was a floating treasure trove. This young man, made desperate by his desperate circumstances, proceeded to rob the dead. He was interrupted in his work by a man not less desperate than himself. A compact was made between them, and they decided to divide the spoils. Afterward, in the dim light of the early morning out upon the bay, a dispute arose between them over a division of the booty. The result was, the younger man, and the one who had first found the body, shot the other, and sunk the still breathing body of his antagonist beneath the waves. The young man was Emsley Merritt, the other Hank Skinner."

Minnie's eyes dilated with wonder and astonishment, and she gave utterance to various ejaculations, while Sleuth proceeded.

"Little more than what you know remains to be told. The stone tied to Hank Skinner fortunately became disentangled, and he arose to the surface, and was finally rescued, but for years was an idiot. While Emsley Merritt, supposing him dead, and believing that there had been no witnesses, disguised himself as the original Mr. Decker, and succeeded in cashing the checks found upon the dead man's person. With the proceeds of the robbery of the dead Emsley Merritt engaged in business, and after many years became a millionaire. Now comes a most singular episode in this tragic story. Emsley Merritt, the rich banker, was robbed mysteriously. I was called in to unravel the mystery of robbery. Among the things stolen was a curiously wrought chain. This chain the banker set a high value upon, and I dwelt upon it as a tangible clew to detecting the robber. That chain I purchased a few days later from Emsley Merritt's son in a gambling-saloon, where he was trying to pawn it. From the first I suspected this young man as the robber of his father. The discovery of this chain in his possession confirmed my suspicion. Two days later I had an interview with you at the theater, at the solicitation of my friend, Harry Loveland. During that interview I learned the history of your father's disappearance, and, wonderful to relate, found upon your person an exact counterpart of the banker's missing chain, and learned that it was a part of one worn by your father at the time he disappeared. I at once set to work to inquire into the antecedents of Emsley Mer-



ritt. By an unintended admission from him I learned that the chain had been in his possession since about the time your father was missed. Other circumstances led me to believe that he was your father's murderer, and had grown rich upon the ill-gotten proceeds of his crime. In this I was mistaken. It seems that there was a witness to our interview at the theater, a part of our conversation was overheard—

"What," interrupted Minnie, suddenly, "could have aroused Emsley Merritt to dog my steps?"

"There is another wonderful coincidence in this strange story. You had written out for me the circumstances which you afterward related to me personally, and lost the manuscript. You dropped it at the entrance to the theater; it was found by Emsley Merritt, who had attended the theater for the purpose of watching the movements of his son. He read it, and by it was enabled to identify you as the daughter of the man whose dead body he had robbed on the Bay Ridge shore. He immediately put a detective on your track. That was how our interview was overheard, and he learned the facts which led him to believe that I was interested in tracing up your father's murderer. The only clew was those two fatal chains. Thus you see his anxiety to get possession of your chain and locket. He not only feared a discovery of the robbery, but feared also that it might lead to developments proving the murder of Hank Skinner. Had it not been for this latter he would

have compromised. This," said Sleuth, "is about all that I have to relate concerning the dark side of this drama. Now it devolves upon me to come to a settlement with you upon the result of my services. The majority of my calculations were correct. The fortune stolen from your dead father was the original capital upon which Emsley Merritt built his immense fortune. I claimed for you, from him, a share, as the heiress of Charles Decker, of the profits arising from that capital. Emsley Merritt admitted the claim, and made the only restitution left to him, and paid over to me your share. That share in bonds and cash amounting to half a million dollars is deposited, subject to your order, in a trust company."

Minnie sprung to her feet, while Mrs. Obitz gave utterance to an exclamation of wonder and joy. Minnie was speechless, but, in the excitement of the moment, Mrs. Obitz seized Sleuth's hand, and exclaimed:

"You are worthy of her! you're worthy of her."

Minnie stood gazing upon the old detective, her countenance beaming with gratitude and thanks, while she murmured: "What wonderful news! Oh, God, oh, God, if Harry was only here my happiness would be complete." Burying her face in her hands she unconsciously murmured, "Oh, Harry, Harry, why don't you come to me?"

Suddenly, like a flash, burst from Sleuth's lips the exclamation, "True heart, Harry is

here!" Rising suddenly to his full height Sleuth wrenched his hand loose from the surprised Mrs. Obitz, and dashing a wig from his head and tearing the whiskers from his face, stood revealed the strong, handsome, faithful, brave, loving Harry Loveland.

As Mrs. Obitz fell back with her hands clasped in astonishment, Minnie, with one wild shout of gladness rushed into the arms of her brave and loyal lover.

The mystery was solved. Harry Loveland's unaccountable absence was accounted for. The mystery of his existence was unraveled. There had always been a mystery surrounding Sleuth the detective. His sudden disappearances and as sudden reappearances were now accounted for. The greatest among all his talents as a detective was his ability to disguise himself and play the rôle of an old man. His real identity had never been suspected by his most intimate associates.

Reader, it is not necessary to follow further the incidents of these two eventful lives. They had not found the path of love an easy road, but their friends say that the trials of their earlier acquaintance are compensated for by the quiet joy and even tenor of their married life.

Recently a brilliant star, described as a married lady of great wealth, beauty and talent, has charmed immense audiences as an amateur dramatist upon several occasions for charitable purposes. This lady is the Minnie Lamont of our story. Now, then, who is she?

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